

# **SRI AUROBINDO ON EDUCATION**

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# Preface

Indian thinkers have dwelt on the philosophy of education and all related aspects like knowledge, intelligence, mind and the functions of teaching and learning to which there are ample references in the texts and to the illustrious teachers of yore like Sri Krishna, Vidura, Bhishma, Dronacharya in the Mahabharata and Vashista in the Ramayana. At a much later stage, one encounters teachers like Susruta, teaching Ayurveda to his students, drawing out the characteristics of an ideal teacher and an ideal student. Buddha and Mahavira have been great teachers. It may even be worthwhile to cull out the principles of teaching and learning embodied in their teachings from the available textual evidences. The quality of Indian discourse on Teaching and Learning has been widely acknowledged. There are many more examples during the medieval times of effective teachers, both of the religious and vocational kinds, which may be taken as the main foundations of educational thoughts of the present times.

In the modern India too there have been many original thinkers on education, who have felt the need for a review of the educational system introduced by the British Raj, creating loyal servants of the government. There was a search for a better system of education in the country among the reformers and intellectuals. In this process, a good deal of thinking, combined with actual experimentation on various alternative models of education had taken place. Unfortunately, their contributions have not been adequately reflected in the educational decisions during recent times. Among others, we can remember the contribution of Vivekananda, Tagore, Aurobindo, Tilak, Zakir Husain, Radhakrishnan and above all, Mahatma Gandhi. It is high time to review the principles of education expounded by them and to examine their validity in the present context.

In order to sensitise the teacher educators of the country to the indigenous thinkers and to develop short and meaningful reading material covering each of the indigenous thinkers of education, the NCTE decided to publish monographs and to organise interactions through seminars of teacher educators from all over the country. The monographs are meant to be self-educational material. They can also be useful for initiating discourses among the pupil teachers on various aspects of education covering each of the indigenous thinkers. The first publication *Gandhi on Education* was received very well by the teachers and teacher educators. It was followed by another entitled '*Zakir Husain on Education*'. The present monograph covering the thoughts of Sri Aurobindo has been written by Prof. Manoj Das an eminent scholar and author of international repute.

Sri Aurobindo has been widely acclaimed as a modern seer and a Vedic scholar. He had headed the first National College of Education of Calcutta and had written extensively on the subject of education. His approach to 'Integral education' is in itself a unique concept. Education of the body, mind and spirit are each expounded in his writings on education, but their integration is even more significant. He has also dwelt on the social and psychological aspects of education. His thought has been put to practice at Sri Aurobindo Ashram's educational programmes, The Auroville and several other schools of the country.

"The first principle of teaching is that nothing can be taught". This statement of Sri Aurobindo condenses a whole lot of theories of education and a new form of pedagogy closer to integral approach to education. It puts learning above teaching. It makes learning a self-starting, self propelling process. It redefines the role of the teacher from a mere possessor of information to a facilitator and a guide for the learner. I am not aware of any other profound statement in teaching which has such a permanent validity.

I wish to quote Sri Aurobindo here to reflect the wide horizon of his perception on education in its international dimensions on the one hand and that of the eternal human values on the other :

"The world-state will give its inhabitants the great adventures of peace, economical well being, general security, the intellectual, cultural, social activity and progress. None of these are in

themselves sufficient to create the thing needed. For that certain psychological elements would have to be present in great strength. First as religion of humanity much more powerful, explicit, self-conscious, universal in its approach than the nationalists religion of the country, secondly, the clear recognition by man in all his thought and life of a single soul of humanity of which each man and each people is an incarnation and soul-form, thirdly, an ascension of men beyond the principle of ego and yet without destruction of individuality; fourthly, a principle and arrangement of the common life which would give free play to individual variations by which the soul of man lives and grows great."

His expectations from education are laudable and at the same time, they reflect an ideal to be pursued. It reflects the values of a modern world not scuttled by narrow perceptions and drab materialism. It throws light on several other aspects of education which deserve intensive analyses, discourse and validation.

I am grateful for the efforts taken by Prof. Manoj Das for writing the present monograph highlighting Sri Aurobindo's Thoughts on Education. He completed the monograph within a short time inspite of a rather crowded schedule during the 125th year commemorative celebration of Sri Aurobindo. Prof. C.H.K. Misra, Consultant, NCTE, deserves appreciation for co-ordinating this project.

The monograph has covered many aspects of the subject meaningfully. I hope the teacher educators of the country will find it relevant and useful.

**J.S. Rajput**

# 1

## ADVENTURE IN CONSCIOUSNESS

“What is the scope of your study ?” an Indian who had travelled to Athens asked Socrates, according to Aristoxenus, a disciple of Aristotle.

“We are trying to know man”, replied Socrates. The Indian laughed. “How can you know man without first knowing God ?” was the Indian’s rejoinder.

The Indian psyche believed that man is only one of the numerous manifestations of a Primary Cause. He may be of great significance, but we cannot fully understand him if we view him as an independent phenomenon. He as well as everything else can be understood only when we understand THAT from which everything emerges.

This Upanishadic truth, considered for long as a mystic jargon by many, is fast tending to become a universal realisation. Everything in the phenomenal universe is related to one another because everything owes its origin to one thing—call it a Power, a Force, a Reality or Brahman or X. Also, because that essential X, in an evident or hidden form, is present in everything, that things are related to one another. This fact of inter-relationship of a grand unifying truth in Nature is tersely described by Paul Davies :

“Without electro-magnetism there would be no atoms, no chemistry or biology, and no heat or light from the sun. If there were no strong nuclear force then nuclei could not exist, and so again there would be no atoms or molecules, no chemistry or biology, nor would the sun and stars be able to generate heat and light from nuclear energy. Even the weak force plays a crucial role in shaping the universe. If it did not exist, the nuclear reactions in the sun and stars could not proceed, and supernovae would probably not occur, and the vital life-giving heavy elements would therefore be unable to permeate the universe. Life might well be impossible. When we remember that these four very different types of forces, each one vital for generating the complex structures that make our universe so active and interesting, all derive from a single, simple superforce, the ingenuity of it all literally boggles the mind.”<sup>1</sup>

To know in its entirety any single phenomenon from its surface is well-nigh impossible. But if one could know the essential X, knowing itself assumes a new meaning, a new dimension.

To enable man to reach that point is to liberate him, and that was deemed to be the purpose of education. *Sa vidya ya vimuktaye* (Education liberates) says the *Vishnu Purana*.<sup>2</sup>

In a sense, the process of evolution itself is a process of liberation. The manifestation of the earliest forms of life as plants out of the apparently lifeless matter was a step towards liberation of the imprisoned consciousness. A far greater degree of freedom of consciousness—and an exercise of that freedom in infinitely variant ways—was possible with the emergence of the primeval creatures, from worms and insects to the whales and the dinosaur, from the birds to the beasts of incalculable varieties.<sup>3</sup>

That urge for freedom inherent in Nature, for releasing its possibilities and potentialities, received a new turn with the emergence of man, “at the bottom an animal, midway a citizen, and at the top a divine” as Henry Ward Beecher put it. And he added, “But the climate of this world is such that few ripen at the top.”<sup>3</sup>

The process of education was set into motion to create the necessary climate for a proper 'ripening' of man – and long has been the history of this process, experience and intuition, necessity and curiosity, demands of environment and quest for the meaning of life, all contributing to it.

Man, needless to say, is the only creature who has never stopped growing. With relentless zeal he has not only adapted himself to the changing environment, but also has obliged the environment to adapt to his conveniences. Emerging from the world of primeval Nature he has created for himself new worlds – of art, architecture, literature, music, philosophy and spirituality. His activities and achievements in all these spheres have again meant nothing but the gradual realisation of his own potentialities, a joy in the freedom of expression, experience and adventure.

If the process of evolution itself is a movement of consciousness realising its own freedom from its bondage to material and other limitations, the 20th century, the era we are leaving behind, has witnessed the most momentous events and ideas ensuring greater freedom for man in several fronts. Imperialism, colonialism, monarchy and feudalism collapsed – all ensuring man's social, political and economic freedom. Several revolutions and reformations, emancipation of women from social taboos and discrimination, end of apartheid – all point in the same direction. Science and technology have played their role in according a greater dignity to the individual.

But these facts of external freedom do not mean much unless they culminate in a freedom from ignorance. Sri Aurobindo believes that the realisation of such a freedom is not only a possibility, but also a certainty inherent in the very nature of evolutionary developments. The true role of education is in preparing and helping man to arrive there – at a new phase of evolution.

Man is neither an accident nor a freak of Nature. He is an evolving being, awaiting his fulfilment. Not doubt, he has come a long way from his primitive existence via a stage dominated by vital impulses, he has been a mental creature for long and has achieved marvels with his intelligence and intellect. Proud of intellect we may be, but as Einstein warns, "We should take care not to make the intellect our god; it has, of course, powerful muscles, but no personality."<sup>4</sup>

Man must aspire to go beyond his intellect.

But first the spirit's ascent we must achieve  
Out of the chasm from which our nature rose.  
The soul must soar sovereign above the form  
Our hearts we must inform with heavenly strength.  
Surprise the animal with the occult god.  
Then kindling the gold tongue of sacrifice,  
Calling the powers of a bright hemisphere,  
We shall shed the discredit of our mortal state,  
Make the abyss a road for Heaven's descent,  
Acquaint our depths with the supernal Ray  
And cleave the darkness with the mystic Fire.<sup>5</sup>

— Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*

To view man from this angle presented by Sri Aurobindo and to visualise a system of education in keeping with such a destiny of man is a call for a grand adventure. It is time we respond to it.

## 2

# GLIMPSES OF SRI AUROBINDO'S LIFE

“Biographies are but the clothes and buttons of the man—the biography of the man himself cannot be written.”

—Mark Twain, *Autobiography* (1924)

Although Sri Aurobindo's first biography in English was published, obviously without his knowledge in 1910, the year Sri Aurobindo came over to Pondicherry in his late thirties. Later when a scholar proposed to write a biography with his knowledge, Sri Aurobindo discouraged him, saying that no one could write about his life because it had not been on the surface for man to see.

Sri Aurobindo's reluctance would surprise many, for his life, even the first thirtyseven years of it, which, he mostly spent in England, Baroda (Vadodara) and Calcutta, had been marked by tumultuous events and most significant ones in relation to the recent history of the nation. How does he belittle them ?

The fact is, Sri Aurobindo considered his most worthwhile actions as those which were not on the surface, but deep in the ocean of consciousness—actions which were too profound for any factual narration. Whatever we know of them, we know through the persistent queries of his disciples and, of course, much can be surmised from his writings.

However, so many have violated his suggestions against writing his biography and we too, following the academic traditions, give below a chronological account of his life—a bare outline of it.

Sri Aurobindo's father, Dr. K. D. Ghose, who had received a post-graduate medical degree from the West, was totally Westernized in his life-style and sense of values. On the other hand Sri Aurobindo's mother, Swarnalata Devi was the daughter of Rajnarayan Bose, known as “the grandfather of Indian Nationalism”, a great patriot and visionary.

Sri Aurobindo, the third son in the family, was born on August 15, 1872.

Neither the mother nor the grandfather had much opportunity to mould Sri Aurobindo's outlook, for Dr. Ghose left all his three sons, the elder two being Benoy Bhushan and Man Mohan respectively, at Loretto Convent, Darjeeling, in the company of European children. Sri Aurobindo was then aged five.

Two years later, in 1875, Dr. Ghose and Swarnalata Devi led their children to England and left them at Manchester, under the care of Latin scholar, Mr. Drewett.

In 1884 the three boys shifted to London, with Mrs. Drewett, a devout Christian, as their guardian. Sri Aurobindo was admitted to St. Paul's School, where he continued for five years, shining as a brilliant student, securing all the top prizes for literature and history. His elder brother, Man Mohan, grew into a poet and as a friend of Oscar Wilde and Lawrence Binyon.

Sri Aurobindo's poetic genius began to bloom at this stage though very little of his writing of this period has survived the vicissitudes of time. Mrs. Drewett left them before long and the boys had to live through great hardship because Dr. Ghose, a legendary philanthrope at home, neglected to send his sons even the minimum amount of money they needed. Recollects Sri Aurobindo :

"During a whole year a slice or two of sandwich, bread and butter and a cup of tea in the morning and in the evening a penny saveloy formed the only food."

A scholarship from St. Paul's enabled Sri Aurobindo to go to King's College, Cambridge, in 1889. He practically bagged all the prizes in Greek and Latin. He passed the first part of the classical Tripos in the first class in 1892. The same year he successfully passed his I.C.S. examination. But he did not report for the riding test and thereby got himself disqualified for the Civil Services.

His well-wishers, who did not know that Sri Aurobindo had secured his disqualification deliberately, tried to persuade the authorities to admit Sri Aurobindo into the Service ignoring the technical lacuna in his performance. G.W. Prothero, a Senior Fellow of King's College, wrote to James Cotton, Sir Henry Cotton's brother :

"He performed his part of the bargain as regards the college most honourably and took a high place in the first class of the classical Tripos, part one, at the end of the second year of his residence. He also obtained certain college prizes, showing command of English and literary ability. That a man should have been able to do this (which alone is quite enough for most under-graduates) and at the same time to keep up his I.C.S. work, proves very unusual industry and capacity. Besides his classical scholarship, he possessed knowledge of English literature far beyond the average of under-graduates, and wrote much better English than most young Englishmen."

The authorities would have probably considered the submission made on Sri Aurobindo's behalf (though without his consent) sympathetically, but by then they had received the intelligence that Sri Aurobindo was a member of a secret Society called the "Lotus and Dagger", dedicated to fighting for India's freedom. His speeches at the Indian Majlis at Cambridge, attacking the British rule in India, had been reported too.

It was a relief to Sri Aurobindo that the I.C.S. mercifully left him unclaimed. He had, needless to say, no call for that kind of a career.

Just then, Maharaja Sayaji Rao, the Gaekwad of Baroda was on a visit to London. James Cotton arranged a meeting between him and Sri Aurobindo and the Maharaja recruited Sri Aurobindo to his government. After an absence of fourteen years, Sri Aurobindo returned to India in February 1893. It was a quiet homecoming, preceded by a tragedy unknown to him. The ship by which he was to reach Mumbai sank off the coast of Lisbon – and the shocking news reached Dr. K. D. Ghosh who had no knowledge of his son having changed his plan at the last moment and of having boarded another ship. Dr. Ghosh died of a heart-attack.

Sri Aurobindo was overwhelmed by a vast peace that descended on him the moment he set foot on the soil of India at Apollo Bunder, Mumbai. That seems to be the way the soul of India received him. Years later he wrote to a disciple :

"My own life and my yoga have always been, since my coming to India, both this-worldly and other-worldly without any exclusiveness on either side ....Since I set foot on the Indian soil on the Apollo Bunder in Bombay, I began to have spiritual experiences, but these were not divorced from this world but had an inner and infinite bearing on it, such as a feeling of the Infinite pervading material space and the Immanent inhabiting material objects and bodies. At the same time I found myself entering supraphysical worlds and planes with influences and an effect from them upon the material plane, so I could make no sharp divorce or irreconcilable opposition between what I have called the two ends of existence and all that lies between them."

We do not know who informed him of his father's demise. He proceeded straight to Vadodara and joined the Gaekwad's administration as Professor of English and French at the Maharaja's College. During his thirteen years of stay there, he also worked in several departments of the Maharaja's Secretariat at different times, apart from working as the Vice-Principal and Acting Principal of the College.

Simultaneously, he delved deep into the ancient Indian lore, mastering Sanskrit, Bengali and several other Indian languages. He translated parts of the epics and works of Kalidasa and Bhartrihari into English, wrote original poetry and plays and began practising Yoga.

All those who were in contact with him knew about these activities of his, but very few people knew that he had become the source of inspiration for groups of dedicated youths, scattered in different parts of India, ready to sacrifice their lives for the cause of the motherland's freedom. Through some of his trusted lieutenants including his younger brother Barindra, he channelised their spirit along a certain line of preparatory action.

The Indian National Congress, formed in 1885, was pursuing a policy that was nowhere nearer the goal of freedom for the country. In a periodical named the *Indu Prakash* published at Mumbai and edited by his Cambridge friend K. G. Deshpande, Sri Aurobindo wrote a series of articles under the title "New Lamps for Old" which created a stir in the political circle of the time.

Interesting glimpses of Sri Aurobindo's Vadodara days are left by Direndra Kumar Roy, a well-known Bengali writer, who lived with Sri Aurobindo for a while to help him learn Bengali. Roy was amazed at the fact that Sri Aurobindo would at times refuse an invitation from the Maharaja himself for joining him for breakfast or dinner, under the pretext that he had no time, while so many Europeans and members of the Indian nobility waited for days together for an appointment with the Maharaja!

Sri Aurobindo did not care for status or money and he lived the life of an ascetic. There was no change in this even after his marriage to Mrinalini Devi in 1901, at Calcutta. Roy sums up his impression of him with these words : "Sri Aurobindo was not a man of this earth; he was a god descended from heavens, probably under a curse."

One of his private letters to Mrinalini Devi, written from Vadodara which became famous because the prosecution produced it in the Court in the course of the historic Alipore Conspiracy Case, gives an intimate picture of his mind (translated from Bengali by an early biographer) :

"I have three madnesses. Firstly, it is my firm faith that whatever virtue, talent, higher education and knowledge and wealth, which God has given me, belongs to Him. I have the right to spend only as much as is needed for the maintenance of the family and on what is absolutely necessary. Whatever remains should be returned to the Divine. If I spend all of it on myself, for personal comfort, for enjoyment, then I am a thief. According to Hindu Scriptures one who accepts money from the Divine and does not return it to Him is a thief. Till now I have been giving only a small fraction of my money to God and have been spending nine-tenths of it for my personal happiness – thus have I settled the account and have remained immersed in worldly happiness. Half of the life has already been wasted; even an animal feels gratified in feeding itself and its family.....

"I have no regrets for the money that I gave to Sarojini or to Usha, because assisting others is Dharma, to protect those who depend on you is a great Dharma, but the account is not settled if one gives only to one's brothers and sisters. In these hard days, the whole country is like a dependent at our doors. I have thirty crores of brothers and sisters in this country – many of them die of starvation, most of them are weakened by suffering and troubles and are somehow dragging on their existence. They must be helped. What do you say, will you be my wife sharing this Dharma with me ? We will eat and dress like ordinary people and buy what is really essential, and give the rest to the Divine. That is what I would do. If you agree to it, and accept the principle of sacrifice then my resolution can be fulfilled. You were complaining that you have made no progress. This is a path to progress that I point out to you. Would you like to take that path ?

"The second folly has recently taken hold of me. It is this : by whatever means, I must get the direct realisation of the Lord. The religion of today consists in repeating the name of God every now and then, in praying to Him in the presence of everybody and in showing to people how religious one is; I do not want it. If the Divine is there, then there must be a way of experiencing His existence, of realising His presence; however hard the path, I have taken a firm irresolution to follow it. Hindu



Dharma asserts that the path is to be found in one's own self, in one's mind. The rule that enables one to follow the path is also given to me; I have begun to observe all the rules and within a month I have been able to ascertain that the words of the Hindu Dharma are not false, I have had the experience of all the signs that have been mentioned by it. I would like to take you also along that path; you would not be able to keep up with me as you have not yet had the knowledge, but there is nothing to prevent your following me. Anybody can reach perfection by following the path. But it depends upon one's choice to enter the path. Nobody can force you to enter it. If you are willing, I will write more about this subject.

"The third folly is this : whereas others regard the country as an inert object, and know it as the plains, the fields, the forests, the mountains and rivers, I look upon my country as the mother, I worship her and adore her as the mother. What would a son do when a demon sitting on the breast of his mother is drinking her blood? Would he sit down content to take his meals, and go on enjoying himself in the company of his wife and children, or would he, rather, run to the rescue of his mother? I know I have the strength to uplift this fallen race; it is not physical strength, I am not going to fight with the sword or with the gun, but with the power of knowledge. The power of warrior is not the only kind of force, there is also the power of the 'Brahman' which is founded on knowledge. This is not a new feeling with me, it is not of a recent origin, I was born with it, it is in my very marrow, God sent me to the earth to accomplish this great mission. At the age of fourteen the seed of it had begun to sprout and at eighteen it had been firmly rooted and become unshakable."

That was the time when Curzon's move to partition Bengal inspired a determined protest from all nationalists. "Never had India seen such popular demonstration", wrote Valentine Chirol, the correspondent of *The Times* of London.

At the request of friends who founded the National Council of Education in Calcutta, Sri Aurobindo came over to Calcutta in 1906 to head a college that would be a bold alternative to the system of clerk-making education imposed on India by its colonial masters.

Sri Aurobindo had already developed a distinct educational vision by then. In his article entitled 'A system of National Education' published in 1907, he wrote :

"Every one has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of perfection and strength in however small a sphere which God offers him to take or refuse. The task is to find it, develop it and use it. The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use."

In 1910 was published the article containing the line which has by now become famous as an epigram : "The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught."

Almost simultaneously Bipin Chandra Pal, a leading public figure of the time, launched a newspaper, the *Bande Mataram*, and invited Sri Aurobindo to edit it. Sri Aurobindo acceded to the request and in no time the newspaper, "full of leading and special articles written in English with brilliance and pungency not hitherto attained in the Indian Press", as

S. K. Ratcliffe, the then editor of *The Statesman*, recollected later, became "the most effective voice of what was then called nationalist extremism."

The enthusiasm with which Sri Aurobindo and the *Bande Mataram* were greeted, can be imagined from a comment in *Sandhya* edited by the veteran, Brahmabandhav Upadhyay : "Have you ever seen the spotless all-white Aurobindo (lotus), the hundred-petalled Aurobindo in full bloom in India's Manasarovara?... Our Aurobindo is a rare phenomenon in the world. In him can be marked the splendour of the *Sattvik*, snow-white and resplendent. Great and vast—vast in his heart, great in his personal glory—his *Swadharma*... Pure and complete a man, a fire-charged thunder yet tender and delicate as the lotus-petal.... The words of *Bande Mataram* will drive out your fear; steel your arms with the might of thunder; fire will course through your veins; death will put on a face of a spring-time joy... True, Aurobindo has had his education in England, but he has not succumbed to

its bewitching spell. An efflorescence of the glory of his country's *Swadharma* and culture, Aurobindo is now at the feet of the Motherland, as a fresh-blown lotus of the autumn, luminous with the spirit of his self-offering... There, bow down to the Mother, with the Mantra of *Bande Mataram*. Freedom is not far." (Translated from Bengali).

M. R. Jayakar, a young delegate to the Calcutta Session of the Congress (1906), records in his autobiography, *The Story of My Life* (Vol. 1) :

"I then had any first opportunity of observing from close quarters the Congress leaders of those times with some of whom my contact increased later. I then saw Aurobindo Ghose and his associates. What struck me were his great earnestness and dignified appearance. He had not then developed, so far as outside appearance could show, into a complete Yogi, but I got, from a distance, an indication that his political philosophy was different from that of those who surrounded him."

In 1907 the Government prosecuted the *Bande Mataram* and Sri Aurobindo as its editor for spreading sedition. It was a nationwide sensation. Tagore wrote his famous poem, "Aurobindo, Accept the Salutations of Rabindra", during this period.

The government's case failed in the court. Towards the end of the same year the historic Surat Congress took place where the nationalists and moderates clashed and the former assembled in a separate conference. As author and journalist Henry Nevinston who was present as a correspondent of *The Daily News* of London records in his *New Spirit in India* : "Grave and silent, I think without saying a single word, Mr. Aurobindo Ghose took the chair and sat unmoved, with far-off eyes, as one who gazes at futurity. In clear, short sentences, without eloquence or passion, Mr. Tilak spoke till the stars shone out and someone kindled a lantern at his side."

This was a turning in the history of India's fight for freedom. *Swaraj*, complete freedom, became the specific target to be achieved and Sri Aurobindo had spelt out the methods: Boycott of British goods, national education, organisation of a volunteer force to fight for the cause, etc.

Sri Aurobindo toured several parts of Gujarat and Maharashtra and received ovations the like of which were not known till then. Prosecution Counsel North complained during the Alipore trial : "Aurobindo was treated with the reverence due to a king wherever he went. As a matter of fact, he was regarded as the leader not merely of Bengal but of the whole country."

On May 2, 1908, Sri Aurobindo was arrested, implicated in several militant activities conducted under the leadership of his younger brother, Barindra. From May 5, 1908 till the May 6 of the next year, he was lodged in the Alipore Central Jail, Calcutta.

In his solitary cell, he turned his ordeal into a unique opportunity, realising what he had already known—the Cosmic Consciousness and the Divine in every being and thing. He said in his speech upon his acquittal :

"I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was not longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva, who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade.... I looked and it was not the Magistrate whom I saw, it was Vasudeva, it was Narayana who was sitting there on the bench. I looked at the Prosecuting Counsel and it was not the counsel for the prosecution that I saw; it was Sri Krishna who sat there... and smiled."

The exciting trial continued for a full year, Sri Aurobindo refusing to say or do anything to protect himself. But the young legal genius who stepped forward to defend him—later famous as Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das—proved prophetic when he concluded his final submission with these words :

"My appeal to you therefore is that a man like this who is being charged with the offences imputed to him stands not only before the bar in this Court but stands before the bar of the High Court of History and my appeal to you is this : That long after this controversy is hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, this agitation ceases, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon

as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands. Therefore I say that the man in his position is not only standing before the bar of this Court but before the bar of the High Court of History."

Sri Aurobindo was acquitted. The *Bande Mataram* had ceased publication. He launched an English weekly, the '*Karmayogin*', followed by a Bengali weekly, the '*Dharma*'. The government, however, could never rest in peace with Sri Aurobindo at large. They drew up several strategies to justify his deportation. Lord Minto, the Viceroy and Governor-General of India, would have liked this action very much, but Lord Morley, the Secretary of State for India, was inclined to weigh the question on the scales of pragmatism and not exigencies. "As for deportation, I will not listen to it", he asserted.

As the news of a warrant being issued against Sri Aurobindo for a so-called seditious article by him in the *Karmayogin*, flashed in *The Times*, London, Sir Ramsay MacDonald, leader of the newly formed Labour Party, demanded that the article be produced in the House. When the Secretary of State for India could not oblige him, Sir Ramsay himself produced the magazine and read out passages from it and said, "Surely, to any man who reads this article as it was meant to be read the meaning of that sentence is perfectly clear, and Mr. Aurobindo Ghose, as is perfectly well known by those who have followed his actions and his writings, sincerely believes that the nationalist movement of which he is the head for the time being at any rate, or was still quite recently, is the one guarantee that there shall be no violence done in India and he blames the officials who have suppressed the free expression of Nationalist sentiment for the unfortunate circumstances which have led to murder and death and executions which everyone deplures."

It may be of interest here to refer to a brief dialogue. A Member of the House, Mr. J. King, asked in a friendly way "whether this article is published in Bengali and whether Mr. Aurobindo Ghose is not a Bengali!"

Replied Sir Ramsay : "The article is in the most excellent English. There is not a line of Bengali in the whole of it except the date of this Issue and its own title. Mr. Aurobindo Ghose could no more write an article in Bengali than I could."

While they were confidently debating on the issue, Sri Aurobindo, obeying an inner inspiration, suddenly left Calcutta for the French pocket Chandernagore and later sailed for Pondicherry where he arrived in April, 1910. Even then, in his last but one letter concerning Sri Aurobindo, Minto wrote to Morley (May 26, 1910) : "As to the celebrated Aurobindo, ... I can only repeat what I said to you in my letter of April 14th that he is the most dangerous man we now have to reckon with... and has an unfortunate influence on the student class and Indians who know him quite well have told me he is quite beyond redemption."

But, for Sri Aurobindo, now the issue was the redemption of humanity from its present ignorant state and at Pondicherry he plunged into an exploration of the realms of consciousness, determined to unravel the destiny of man. He saw :

"The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation, for it survives the longest periods of scepticism and returns after every banishment, is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of a secret Immortality. The ancient dawns of human knowledge have left us their witness to this constant aspiration; today we see a humanity satiated but not satisfied by victorious analysis of the externalities of Nature preparing to return to its primeval longings. The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be the last, — God, Light, Freedom, Immortality." — (*The Life Divine*)

Can this primeval quest of man find fulfilment ? For ages, seekers have continued to escape from the so-called mundane life so that they could dwell in an isolated bliss. Was the world then doomed

to remain only a field of travails or an illusion as any number of wise mystics would look upon it—without any spiritual culmination?

Sri Aurobindo saw :

“If a spiritual unfolding on earth is the hidden truth of our birth into Matter, if it is fundamentally an evolution of consciousness that has been taking place in Nature, then man as he is cannot be the last term of that evolution: he is too imperfect an expression of the spirit, Mind itself is a too limited form and instrumentation; Mind is only a middle term of consciousness, the mental being can only be a transitional being. If, then, man is incapable of exceeding mentality, he must be surpassed and Supermind and Superman must manifest and take the lead of the creation. But if his mind is capable of opening to what exceeds it, then there is no reason why man himself should not arrive at Supermind and Supermanhood or at least lend his mentality, life and body to an evolution of that greater term of the spirit manifesting in Nature.”

According to Sri Aurobindo, “At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way.”

Sri Aurobindo visualised the next stage of human evolution possible with the descent of a gnostic power, the Supramental, capable of transforming the present man.

The Mother, French by birth, though of Middle-Eastern ancestry, first met Sri Aurobindo in 1914. The ‘Arya’, a monthly, was launched under her initiative. Many of Sri Aurobindo’s major works were first serialised in this magazine. The Mother had to leave for France about a year later, but the magazine continued to be published. The Mother returned to Pondicherry in 1920 and the Ashram took shape under her loving care. Sri Aurobindo’s works now began to be published in an organised way, first by the Arya Publishing House, Calcutta and later by the Ashram.

Sri Aurobindo, who had started writing at an early age, even during his stay at Manchester (1879-1884), had continued with his creativity through all the turbulent phases of his life, even during his incarceration.

His first book, a collection of poems, entitled *Songs to Myrtilla*, was published in 1895. Between that and the last work to be published during his lifetime, *Savitri* (1950), he had written extensively on Yoga, culture, sociology, in addition to his poetry and plays. He also answered numerous letters from seekers most of which are compiled as books. His major works are *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *The Future Poetry*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *Collected Poems and Plays* and the epic *Savitri*. All this and his translations, letters and minor works were compiled and published in a systematic manner, after his passing away on the December 5, 1950, and a new edition of them, in 30 volumes, was brought out on the occasion of his first birth centenary in 1972.

It is not possible to say in brief about the Mother. Her spiritual vision, her conviction about the destiny of man, were the same as those of Sri Aurobindo, from her childhood. She was the collaborator in Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga of Transformation. She affirmed that what Sri Aurobindo represents in earth’s history is not a teaching, not even a revelation, but a decisive action direct from the Supreme.

On January 6, 1952, the Mother inaugurated the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre—later to be known as Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.

Writes Dr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar :

“The key to knowledge is within, for it is the awakened soul within that observes, records, sorts out, omits, unites, transmutes, and turns facts and information into knowledge, knowledge into wisdom, and wisdom into the dynamo of right aspiration and action. The spark is indeed within, albeit often obscured by the thick fog of the egoistic prison-house. It is the true task of education to provide the atmosphere, the friendly help or guidance, the leverage that will release the spark and

make it flame forth into a blaze of consciousness characterised by an ever increasing intensity and wideness. The physical, the vital, the mental, all will be drafted into this adventure of consciousness, but still the soul will be the rider of the chariot that is the body, with the vital and the mind as the twin horses of the race. Sri Aurobindo has defined Yoga as 'a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being, and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent Existence.' In its far aims as also in its essential processes, education coalesces with Yoga, and it is thus no mystery at all that the Centre of Education is an inseparable part of the Yogashram at Pondicherry.

"Since education is viewed essentially as a field conducive to soul-awakening and soul-growth, the Centre has no use for the artificial distinction between education for boys and education for girls. The Centre of Education accordingly provides the same programme—including physical education—for boys and girls. There is still room for plenty of choice, but the options are made by the inner preference and not by the fact of sex and the compulsion of traditional taboos.

Again, what brings pupils and teachers together in the general run of educational institutions is a system of market-place attitudes and monetary objectives. At the Centre of Education, on the contrary, pupils pay no fees—once admitted, the education is free. As for the teachers, although fully qualified for the work they have to do, they are only maintained by the Ashram like the other 'sadhaks' and receive no salaries or other monetary awards. This elimination of the rancour of the market-place and the lure of mere monetary incentive makes for better pupils and better teachers who are brought together, not as buyers or sellers of knowledge, but as fellow-seekers and pilgrims on the march owing an unswerving allegiance to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as the embodiments of Truth and Love. Academic and hierarchic differentiations have a functional use only, and are not meant to invade the deeper unity that derives from the common spirit of dedication and self-consecration. The Centre of Education is a community, almost a single consciousness, that is trying to realise to the full its evolutionary possibility."

Through her continuous guidance in every matter, the Mother had seen to it that the Centre of Education had found firm roots by the time she left her body on November 17, 1973. But the institution has never believed that it had as though arrived at its destination. It continues to experiment with ideas emerging from Sri Aurobindo's vision, applying them to the process of learning and teaching to the best of its ability.

The Mother, in 1968, also launched Auroville, an epochmaking experiment in collective living, residents of the township trying to rise above their religious, communal and racial limitations and aspiring to look for a greater future. "Auroville wants to be a new creation expressing a new Consciousness in a new way and according to new methods", said the Mother.

In a wider sense the Auroville experiment is an educational experiment. It is an assertion of faith in the future of man and an effort to evolve a new pattern of living, keeping in mind Sri Aurobindo's vision of a new humanity.

### 3

## SRI AUROBINDO'S VISION OF HUMAN DESTINY

There are several angles to look at man and to conclude that he is indeed different from all his fellow-species on this earth — far more different than the birds are from the beasts or, among the beasts themselves, the elephant is from the rodent. But the difference that strikes us immediately is the fact that he is capable of marvelling at himself, he knows that he is a riddle unto himself. "Apart from man, no being wonders at its own existence", said Schopenhauer.

Sri Aurobindo says in *The Life Divine* : "The animal is satisfied with a modicum of necessity; the gods are content with their splendours. But man cannot rest permanently until he reaches some highest good. He is the greatest of living beings because he is the most discontented, because he feels most the pressure of limitations. He alone, perhaps, is capable of being seized by the divine frenzy for a remote ideal."

Mankind, thus different from all the other species, is again marked by difference within itself — depending on factors such as culture, religion, nationality, wealth, education, temperament, refinement and much more. But the most remarkable difference between man and man, it may be said, is determined by the degree of the aforesaid "divine frenzy for a remote ideal."

Indeed, while all the other creatures live in the present, man alone lives in three modes of time simultaneously, be he conscious of it or unconscious of it. He has to drag along his past as memory, he has to struggle through the present; and the future — be it near or be it far — is always a factor to mould his thoughts and actions. In most people this position may not mean anything more than experience (past) in the process of use (present) for a better future, better in the sense of a happier living, but this leads at least a few to raise several basic questions: Why is man what he is ? Why was he created at all ? To live, to enjoy, to suffer, to occasionally reflect, but ultimately to die — are they all we have to 'live' ? Aristotle defining man as a political animal or Spinoza seeing him as a social animal are well-pronounced statements of fact, each carrying a certain truth, but they do not satisfy the fundamental queries. At the same time, man cannot leave these stubborn far behind him.

Aurobindo says in *The Life Divine* : "We speak of the evolution of Life in Matter, the evolution of Mind in Matter; but evolution is a word which merely states the phenomenon without explaining it. For there seems to be no reason why Life should evolve out of material elements or Mind out of living form, unless we accept the Vedantic solution that Life is already involved in Matter and Mind in Life because in essence Matter is a form of veiled Life, Life a form of veiled Consciousness. And then there seems to be little objection to a farther step in the series and the admission that mental consciousness may itself be only a form and a veil of higher states which are beyond mind."

This observation of Sri Aurobindo precisely links the past with the present and the present with the future, for, despite all the progress made by mankind, it cannot rest content until this basic quest has been satisfied.

It seems that there was a time when this basic quest of man, which can be termed as his inner quest, because response to this could come only from an exploration of his consciousness, went hand

in hand with his external explorations of the environment, Nature, in search of better living conditions. In the Indian tradition we come across that remarkable phenomenon, the Rishi, who was at once an explorer of these inner mysteries of life and an architect of life in its social context, capable of leading a seeker along the spiritual path and guiding a king through his pragmatic political crisis; he could author an esoteric hymn and also be a poet of the splendours of life. For him life was a field of experience embracing both the Physical World and the Spirit, but with a goal – and that was the conquest of the former by the latter.

This knowledge, at a certain phase of human development, resulted in the formation of two different paths: the path of the Spirit and the path of the Mundane World. The first meant a total preoccupation with the spirit, ignoring the worldly affairs and the second meant a total absorption in the worldly affairs at the cost of the Spirit – albeit giving some concessions to the latter in the way of taking interest in religion or leading a so-called 'God-fearing' life.

But what the Rishis intended in their aspirations for the conquest of the mundane world by the spirit was not ignoring the mundane nor by its relegation to a position of unreality. Their concept of the conquest was a kind of elevation of the mundane by the spirit – an enlightenment of those elements of our being which are most active in the mundane affairs (namely, our physical existence, our passions and emotions, our thoughts and knowledge) by the alchemy of our soul.

In fact, the Rishis had hit upon the truth that until one had discovered this inner-most aspect of one's being, the Soul, one will never know oneself, nor will one be oneself.

The knowledge and realisation of the soul not only put life on a new pedestal, but also changed its definition. Life could no longer be seen as a mere prisoner in the body, its duration measured by birth and death. In its true nature, it was immortal.

While we find this knowledge of the soul, its immortality in the lores of great antiquity in India (in the Upanishadic story of Nachiketa for example), it was wrapped up in an allegorical myth in another ancient civilisation, as a mere story for the people in general but as a revelation for the initiate.

After wrecking havoc in Thebes, a strange, winged creature with face of a woman, the body of a dog, the tail of serpent and the paws of a lion stationed itself atop a hillock along a desert road. It would throw this riddle at any unsuspecting traveller. "Who is the being to walk on four legs at morn, on two as the day grows and on three in the evening?" The traveller is given time till the sundown. Should he be able to answer, he could pass. If not, the creature pounced upon him and killed him. No traveller escaped death until the day Oedipus happened to reach the spot. "I am the answer", he said when confronted by the terrible creature, and explained, "Man the infant crawls on all fours at the dawn of his life; then he walks normally on two legs; in the evening of his life he takes recourse to a walking stick, his third leg." No sooner had the hero answered the riddle than the enigmatic examiner, the Sphinx, jumped to its own death.

Unmistakable is the wisdom sealed in this famous Grecian-Roman myth, a version of the Upanishadic doctrine: Man dies because he does not know himself. The day he has known himself, it is death that would die! (The bizarre composition of Sphinx, according to one symbolism, indicated its own unreality).

Since it is the Spirit which is at the root of creation and the soul in man is that mode of the Spirit which remains pure and self-conscious whereas the other faculties constituting him, namely his body, life and mind, though essentially modes of the same Spirit, are diluted and self-oblivious, it is through discovering his soul alone that man can discover the truth of himself and, consequently, find answers to all the basic riddles of life.

If was necessary, in the process of evolution, for the mind to get the full opportunity for its thorough exercise, for a demonstration of its marvellous possibilities. Without this exercise of mind's

power of exploration, observation and its capacity for progress by utilisation of its experience and knowledge, we will have neither science nor philosophy, neither technology nor diplomacy.

The irony is, all these achievements of mind have not yielded to man what he had been seeking since the dawn of his consciousness. What is more, those who are capable of reviewing the situation, in regard to man vis-a-vis his fundamental quest, nurture no illusion that the efficacy of mind can ever do justice to that quest. On the other hand, there looms large a fear that the mind, ungoverned by something more enlightened, can be unpredictable in the direction it will take, can wreck havoc on the totality (the being) of which it is only a part.

As Sri Aurobindo diagnoses the situation; at present mankind is going through an evolutionary crisis. It is only through a decisive transcendence of the mind and an emergence into a higher stage of consciousness that man can come face to face with the realisation of all that has remained his dream and his aspiration through the ages.

The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother was directed towards paving the way for such a transcendence – through the transforming intervention of a power of the Divine Consciousness they termed the Supramental. The riddle of Sphinx is the Riddle of our life, but the future awaits not only the man who knows himself, but also the man who is capable of applying that knowledge to fulfil his destiny – by welcoming the advent of a greater Self :

“And when that greater Self comes sea-like down  
To fill this image of our transience,  
All shall be captured by delight, transformed :  
In waves of undreamed ecstasy shall roll  
Our mind and life and sense and laugh in a light  
Other than this hard limited human day,  
The body’s tissues thrill apotheosised,  
Its cells sustain bright metamorphosis.....”

— Savitri

Never in history has there been an age of paradox like ours. Today man builds magnificent cities, and also makes bombs capable of destroying them totally, man has produced great wealth, yet the deadly sting of poverty keep many limbs of humanity paralysed. Those who are in a position to enjoy the fruits of technological progress are haunted by an overwhelming sense of insecurity. Man has developed the greatest ever awareness of human rights and dignity, yet his ego – individual and collective – turns tyrant to others at the earliest opportunity.

Can such broadening gulfs on so many fronts be bridged? Not until man has climbed to a new state of consciousness, a higher one than hitherto realised, where mentally irreconcilable situations can be reconciled. According to Sri Aurobindo’s diagnosis of the situation, it can be said that we are passing through the greatest-ever transition. This does not mean that a sweeping social, educational, political or cultural change is called for. Changes in these spheres will of course come – but not through any kind of constitutional reform. They will be the outcome of a mighty upliftment in human consciousness.

The promise of such a stride in consciousness, Sri Aurobindo says, is inherent in the natural scheme of things and is evident in man’s perennial urge to exceed himself, in his age-old quest for perfection.

Is the progress visualised by Sri Aurobindo spiritual in nature? Indeed, it is, but in the highest sense of the term true spirituality does not admit any dichotomy between the material world and the spirit. In his *Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo shows how man’s earliest formula of wisdom also promises to be his last – his quest after God, Light, Freedom, Bliss and Immortality. All his endeavours in the way of improving his life and his environment and giving expression to his diverse inner urges – scientific, artistic, et al – can fall into one of these categories. Even the destructive instincts and emotions are not independent realities by themselves, but are either the pulls of an inconscient state



from which the process of our emancipation is continuing, or are the distortions and perversions of some of our positive qualities. Truth's relation to falsehood can be compared with light's relation to shadow. "A shadow depends on light for its existence, but light does not depend for its existence on the shadow."

For long man has tried to get rid of the evil in life through the means of rejection or destruction. He has not succeeded. Rejection only keeps the evil in waiting; destruction is just not possible – for in a sense nothing can be truly destroyed. Besides, good and evil are intricately interwoven. Even man's noblest inspirations such as love and religion can be corroded with lust and violence ingrained in him. Sri Aurobindo envisages the transformation of the evil. The transforming power, the Supermind, is in fact involved in the evolutionary process. Time has come for man to aspire for its emergence. We are passing through an evolutionary crisis and nothing short of this can really take us out of it.

No simpler summary of Sri Aurobindo's vision and Yoga can be made than the one by the Mother :

"There is an ascending evolution in Nature which goes from the stone to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from the animal to man. Because man is, for the moment, the last rung at the summit of the ascending evolution, he considers himself as the final stage in this ascension and believes there can be nothing on earth superior to him. In that he is mistaken. In his physical nature he is yet almost wholly an animal, a thinking and speaking animal, but still an animal in his material habits and instincts. Undoubtedly, nature cannot be satisfied with such an imperfect result; she endeavours to bring out a being who will be to man what man is to the animal, a being who will remain a man in its external form, and yet whose consciousness will rise far above the mental and its slavery to ignorance.

"Sri Aurobindo came upon earth to teach this truth to men. He told them that man is only a transitional being living in a mental consciousness, but with the possibility of acquiring a new consciousness, the Truth-consciousness, and capable of living a life perfectly harmonious, good and beautiful, happy and fully conscious. During the whole of his life upon earth, Sri Aurobindo gave all his time to establish in himself this consciousness he called supramental, and to help those gathered around him to realise it."

The educational doctrine of Sri Aurobindo, needless to say, has to be closely linked with this futuristic vision of human destiny. Sri Aurobindo startles us by saying that the first thing a teacher must know is that nothing can be taught. The paradox is not meant to be an enigma. He emphasises the need for a natural and spontaneous growth of the child – each being unique – according to its own inherent capacity, its *Swadharama*. The real wisdom lies imbedded in the child. No teacher need tell a child that the flower is beautiful.

Apart from the well-known principles of taking care to see that the education was integral, all the parts of the being, physical, vital or life-element, mind and the spirit within got equal chance to develop simultaneously, Sri Aurobindo's vision of man will oblige us to treat every child as a unique being, a special joy of the creative power in its manifestation of variety. This element of joy is of vital importance and the process of education must be a process of inspiring joy in the child.

Once we accept that man is an evolving being, we have to allow many of our stock ideas to change – ideas which have been formulated taking man as he is for granted. Take, for example, the case of the very discipline which deals with human consciousness – psychology. Once we remember that there is something in man that is in the process of a transformation or an evolution, we will lose our enthusiasm to apply a principle to it which was formulated on the basis of a more or less static proposition.

We have taken the idea for granted that it is the past which determines the present and that the past and present will determine the future. But, in the light of Sri Aurobindo we may very well revise the idea and wonder if it is not the future which has made the past and the present. That is to

say, there is a destiny which is in the process of realising itself and all that has happened and all that is happening are a part of that process. Our interpretation of events will then be quite different. Unlike the American biologist Euston who proposes a solution of human problems by reducing the future generations to pocket-size men and women so that, among other things, food problems will be solved, our attention will go over to a radical change inevitable in human consciousness, for basically all problems concern consciousness.

Let us recall a one-page story by Oscar Wilde. As we know, among the several miracles Jesus had performed, one was to restore sight to a man grown blind, another was to cure a leper and yet another was to resurrect a dead man. Once Jesus comes down from the heavens and enters a locality. It is night. From inside a house comes the sound of music. He enters it and sees a man holding a cup of wine in his hand, enjoying a lusty dance. Jesus touches him on his shoulder. The man gives a start and looks. "I know who you are. Once I was blind. You restored to me my sight. What am I to do with my sight if not enjoy this?"

Jesus sighed and went out into the street. He saw another man chasing a coy damsel. He stood between them. The man stopped, stared at him and said, "I know who you are. Once I had a rotten body. You restored it to its health. How am I going to use it if not in this way?" Jesus sighed and moved away. On the outskirts of the locality, beside a lake, there sat a man shedding tears. Jesus patted him on the back. He looked back and said, "I know who you are. Once I was dead and you revived me. What am I to do with my life if not to weep it away!" Jesus sighed and returned to his abode.

The story leaves in our mind a formidable question. What if all our desires were fulfilled? With the quality of our consciousness remaining what it is, is mere fulfilment of desires going to give us a greater satisfaction in living, a greater sense of fulfilment? Doesn't affluence and a sense of futility often go together? Even the expectations which the intelligentsia in the 18th and 19th century had — that science and socialism will usher in a new and happy civilisation — were belied in the 20th century. Nevertheless if Huxley thought of applying a principle of positive eugenics to check the quality of the future population and Russell wondered if Providence made such an elaborate backdrop for a puny and transitory result like man, Sri Aurobindo brings a certain assurance about the future of man and in his light we find a solid ground for developing a new optimism for the future, despite some deplorable signs to the contrary and if this faith in the future can be infused into the process of education and the message of a new consciousness can replace the stock notions of human nature, we can then hope for a qualitative turn in our philosophy of education.

Education would then embrace, to quote from *The Human Cycle* by Sri Aurobindo, "all knowledge in its scope, but would make the whole trend and aim and the permeating spirit not mere worldly efficiency, but this self-developing and self-finding. It would pursue physical and psychical science not in order merely to know the world and Nature in her processes and to use them for material human ends, but to know through and in and under and over all things the Divine in the world and the ways of the Spirit in its masks and behind them. It would make it the aim of ethics not to establish a rule of action whether supplementary to the social law or partially corrective of it, the social law that is after all only the rule, often clumsy and ignorant, of the biped pack, the human herd, but to develop the divine nature in the human being. It would make it the aim of Art not merely to present images of the subjective and objective worlds, but to see them with the significant and creative vision that goes behind their appearances and to reveal the Truth and Beauty of which things visible to us and invisible are the forms, the masks or the symbols and significant figures."

The greatest help we can give to the future is to arm the young with an unshakable faith in the future.

## 4

# NATIONALISM AND EDUCATION

It was Sri Aurobindo's influence on the Indian National Congress, in the first decade of the century which made the organisation include Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education in its programme. He wrote editorial in the *Bande Mataram*, more than once, urging the party to give sufficient attention to education, which was divided in two groups. One favoured running a chain of national schools, parallel with the government schools and the other group was much more ambitious. It wanted its ideas to infiltrate all the government schools!

The grotesque defects in the system of education that prevailed in India pained not only patriotic Indians, but also some Englishmen. For example, wrote W. W. Hunter, "Your State education is producing a revolt against three principles which, although they were pushed too far in ancient India, represent the deepest wants of human nature – the principle of discipline, the principle of religion, the principle of contentment." He said further, "What are you to do with this great clever class, forced up under a foreign system, without discipline, without contentment and without God?"

In his well-known work, *Indian Unrest* (1910), Valentine Chirol observed :

"The fundamental weakness of our Indian educational system is that the average Indian student cannot bring his education into any direct relation with the world in which, outside the class or lecture room, he continues to live. For that world is still the old Indian world of his forefathers, and it is as far removed as the poles asunder from the Western world which claims his education."

Hemendra Prasad reviews the situation in his foreword to *A Phase of the Swadeshi Movement : National Education* (1953) by Prof. Haridas Mukherjee and Prof. Uma Mukherjee, thus :

"But they had to encounter immense difficulty in introducing a system of national education chiefly because the alien Government stood in the way. The Government would not recognise any system of education which was not stamped with their approval and, consequently, was not likely to serve their end. The door to the professions was barred for those who were not the products of the system which had a denationalising effect on the people. It created a huge hiatus between the educated and the masses; for, the educated considered themselves a separate class and developed what may be called superiority-complex. As an inevitable result the desire to diffuse the fertilising waters of intellectual knowledge from their great and copious fountainheads at the Universities by a thousand irrigating channels over the whole length and breadth of the land – deteriorated and learning was not connected with the living forces of society – the masses were not made a sharer in the classic traditions of the lettered world."

"In 1906, the National Council of Education was founded in Calcutta. The Bengal National College and School started its working career since August 15 at a rented house at 191/1, Bowbazar Street, with Aurobindo Ghose as its first Principal and Satis Chandra Mukherjee as its first Executive Head or the Superintendent.... Aurobindo's name alone proved a very valuable asset to the Bengal National College and added enormously to the prestige of the institution in public eyes. But as he soon became, – particularly since October 1906, – more and more involved in active politics and in the conduct of the famous *Bande Mataram*, – he could not turn up regularly in the college whose life-force was, in fact, Satis Chandra Mukherjee, the silent inspirer of Young Bengal."

That was a turbulent time. The freedom movement was gathering momentum. The character of the Indian National Congress was to undergo a radical change at its historic Surat session in 1907, the nationalists meeting under the Presidentship of Sri Aurobindo and the government bringing the charge of sedition against the *Bande Mataram* and then arresting him in connection with the Alipore Conspiracy Case (1908).

But the need for a greater experiment in national education continued to be felt by him. In the *Bande Mataram* of 24 February 1908 he wrote, under the title 'A National University':

"The idea of a National University is one of the ideas which have formulated themselves in the national consciousness and become part of the immediate destiny of a people. It is a seed which is sown and must come to its fruition, because the future demands it and the heart of the nation is in accord with the demand. The processes of its increase may be rapid or it may be slow, and when the first beginnings are made, there may be many errors and false starts, but like a stream gathering volume as it flows, the movement will grow in force and certainty, the vision of those responsible for its execution will grow clearer, and their hands will be helped in unexpected ways until the purpose of God is worked out and the idea shapes itself into an accomplished reality. But it is necessary that those who are the custodians of the precious trust, should guard it with a jealous care and protect its purity and first high aim from being sullied or lowered."

Sri Aurobindo, no wonder, could not give his time to the educational movement and the functioning of the College founded by the National Council seems to have deteriorated because of the people managing it trying to dissociate it from the general national fervour sweeping the country and making it purely academic in character. The anguish Sri Aurobindo felt found expression in an article entitled 'National Education', published in the *Karmayogin* (January 1, 1910), the weekly he edited after his acquittal in the Alipore Conspiracy Case and before leaving for Pondicherry :

"National Education languishes because the active force has been withdrawn from it; it does not absolutely perish because a certain amount of Nationalist self-devotion has entrenched itself in this last stronghold and holds it against great odds and under the most discouraging circumstances. A certain amount only, — because part of the active enthusiasm and self-sacrifice which created the movement, has been deliberately extruded from it in obedience to fear or even baser motives, part has abandoned in disgust at the degeneration of the system in incapable hands and the rest is now finding its self-devotion baffled and deprived of the change of success by the same incapacity and weakness at headquarters.

"The National Council of Education, as it is at present composed, has convicted itself of entire incapacity whether to grasp the meaning of the movement or to preserve or create the conditions of its success. To the majority of the members it is merely an interesting academic experiment in which they can embody some of their pet hobbies or satisfy a general vague dissatisfaction with the established University system. To others the only valuable part of it is the technical instruction given in its workshops. The two or three who at all regard it as part of a great national movement, are unnerved by fear, scepticism and distrust... It is folly to expect that the nation at large will either pay heavily or make great sacrifices merely to support an interesting academic experiment, still less to allow a few learned men to spoil the intellectual development of the race by indulging their hobbies at the public expense... Unless this movement is carried on, as it was undertaken, as part of a great movement of national resurgence, unless it is made, visibly to all, a nursery of patriotism and a mighty instrument of national culture, it cannot succeed. It is foolish to expect men to make great sacrifices while discouraging their hope and enthusiasm. It is not intellectual recognition of duty that compels sustained self-sacrifice in masses of men; it is hope, it is the lofty ardour of a great cause, it is the enthusiasm of a noble and courageous effort. It is amazing that men calling themselves educated and presuming to dabble with public movements should be blind to the fact that the success or failure of National Education is intimately bound up with and, indeed, entirely

depends upon the fortunes of the great resurgence which gave it birth. They seem to labour under the delusion that it was an academic and not a national impulse which induced men to support this great effort, and they seek to save the institution from a premature death by exiling from it the enthusiasm that made it possible. They cannot ignore the service done by that enthusiasm, but they regard it merely as the ladder by which they climbed and are busy trying to kick it down. They are really shutting off the steam, yet expect the locomotive to go on."

At Pondicherry, with the appearance of the monthly *Arya*, Sri Aurobindo's vision and reflections on all the great issues of life and of Yoga and spirituality found a distinct medium for their serialised presentation. He wrote "A Preface on National Education" (1920-1921) in which he clearly analysed, in the backdrop of the 20th century, how a national outlook of education can be synthesised with the modern development. He says "National education was not a mere change of control of the educational institutions, the authority passing from the hands of the Westerners to Indians. "I presume that it is something more profound, great and searching that we have in mind and that, whatever the difficulty of giving it shape, it is an education proper to the Indian soul and need and temperament and culture that we are in quest of, not indeed something faithful merely to the past, but to the developing soul of India, to her future need, to the greatness of her coming self-creation, to her eternal spirit."

"There could be questions on the idea of a national education. Is it not true that the training of good citizenship is the same in the East or the West? Is it not true that man is same everywhere and his needs are common? Education should have a universal character and not limited by any concept. No nation can reject the discoveries or inventions in science because they were possible in another country. We cannot dismiss Galileo and Newton and stop with Bhaskara, Aryabhatta and Varahamihira. We cannot revive the syllabus followed at Takshashila or Nalanda. After all we live in the twentieth century and cannot revive the India of Chandragupta or Akbar; we must keep abreast with the march of truth and knowledge, fit ourselves for existence under actual circumstances, and our education must be therefore upto date in form and substance and modern in life and spirit."

To such possible observations, Sri Aurobindo's answer was:

"All these objections are only pertinent if directed against the travesty of the idea of national education which would make of it a means of an obscurantist retrogression to the past forms that were once a living frame of our culture but are now dead or dying things; but that is not the idea nor the endeavour. The living spirit of the demand for national education no more requires a return to the astronomy and mathematics of Bhaskara or the forms of the system of Nalanda than the living spirit of Swadeshi a return from railway and motor traction to the ancient chariot and the bullockcart. There is no doubt plenty of retrogressive sentimentalism about and there have been some queer violences on common sense and reason and disconcerting freaks that prejudice the real issue, but these inconsequent streaks of fantasy give a false hue to the matter. It is the spirit, the living and vital issue that we have to do with, and there the question is not between modernism and antiquity, but between an imported civilization and the greater possibilities of the Indian mind and nature, not between the present and the past, but between the present and the future. It is not a return to the fifth century but an initiation of the centuries to come, not a reversion but a break forward away from a present artificial falsity to her own greater innate potentialities that is demanded by the soul, by the Shakti of India."

That a policy of national education did not mean merely infusing in the student the spirit of the nation's culture, aspirations and other qualities peculiar to it, but something more, to make the student a worthy unit of humanity, was emphasised in the next part of the essay :

"It follows that that alone will be a true and living education which helps to bring out to full advantage, makes ready for the full purpose and scope of human life all that is in the individual man, and which at the same time helps him to enter into his right relation with the life, mind and

soul of the people to which he belongs and with that great total life, mind and soul of humanity of which he himself is a unit and his people or nation a living, a separate and yet inseparable member. It is by considering the whole question in the light of this large and entire principle that we can best arrive at a clear idea of what we would have our education to be and what we shall strive to accomplish by a national education. Most is this largeness of view and foundation needed here and now in India, the whole energy of whose life purpose must be at this critical turning of her destinies directed to her one great need, to find and rebuild her true self in individual and in people and to take again, thus repossessed of her inner greatness, her due and natural portion and station in the life of the human race."

If this were all – though this is profoundly ideal – then this could apply to the ideal system of education emanating from any culturally advanced country of the world. But making a good individual, a good citizen of the country and an ideal citizen of the world could not be the end for the perfect Indian vision of education. Since times immemorial India has discovered as the final goal of life a point beyond the visible horizon of life. It has defined life not as a span of existence bracketed by birth and death, but as a spirit launched into the infinity, at the same time capable of experiencing the infinity in this world of finites assigned to him. A Nachiketa who demanded of the God of Death the power to unravel the mystery of death, a Markandeya who could totally identify himself with the Eternity so that the appointed time for his death came and passed without the powers concerned being able to locate him as a mortal individual, a Savitri who could alter the destiny of her husband by the dint of her love sharpened by askesis, an Arjuna taught to view things and happenings through his inner eye, from the point of view of his soul and thereby look upon as gross a situation as a battle as an opportunity for Yoga – are examples testifying to this attitude of ushering in the alchemy of infinity into the finite life.

It is this aspiration to know the hidden realities which gives the spirit of India, as reflected in its literature, philosophy and traditions, often distorted though, an exclusive feature. An education to be truly Indian must light in the consciousness of the student the flame of this quest.

Hence, said Sri Aurobindo:

"India has seen always in man the individual a soul, a portion of the Divinity enwrapped in mind and body, a conscious manifestation in Nature of the universal self and spirit. Always she has distinguished and cultivated in him a mental, an intellectual, an ethical, dynamic and practical, an aesthetic and hedonistic, a vital and physical being, but all these have been seen as powers of a soul that manifests through them and grows with their growth, and yet they are not all the soul, because at the summit of its ascent it arises to something greater than them all, into a spiritual being, and it is in this fact that she has found the supreme manifestation of the soul of man and his ultimate divine manhood, his *paramartha* and highest *purusartha*. And similarly India has not been understood by the nation or people as an organised State or an armed and efficient community well prepared for the struggle of life and putting all at the service of the national ego, – that is only the disguise of iron armour which masks and encumbers the national *purusha*, – but a great communal soul and life that has appeared in the whole and has manifested a nature of its own and a law of that nature, a *Swabhava* and *Swadharma*, and embodied it in its intellectual, aesthetic, ethical, dynamic, social and political forms and culture. And equally then our cultural conception of humanity must be in accordance with her ancient vision of the universal manifesting in the human race, evolving through life and mind but with a high ultimate spiritual aim, – it must be the idea of the spirit, the soul of humanity advancing through struggle and concert towards oneness, increasing its experience and maintaining a needed diversity through the varied culture and life motives of its many people, searching for perfection through the development of the powers of the individual and his progress towards a diviner being and life, but feeling out too though more slowly after a similar perfectability in the life of the race."

## 5

# CONCEPT OF SPIRITUAL EDUCATION

“Man cannot rest permanently until he reaches some highest good.”

“To fulfil God in life is man’s manhood.”

— Sri Aurobindo

There are two misconceptions about the term ‘Spiritual’ and both are too stubborn to give way to an objective explanation of the word. First, ‘spiritual’ and ‘spirituality’ are understood as synonyms of religious and religion. Second, ‘Spiritual’ is taken to be the opposite of material, pragmatic or practical, an idea that inspires in our minds the picture of other-worldliness and asceticism.

To confuse spirituality with religion, of course, is not always wrong, for much depends on what one understands by religion. Says Sri Aurobindo, “There are two aspects of religion—true religion and religionism. True religion is spiritual religion, that which seeks to live in the spirit, in what is beyond the intellect, beyond the aesthetic and ethical and practical being of man, and to inform and govern these members of our being by the higher light and law of the spirit. Religionism, on the contrary, entrenches itself in some narrow pietistic exaltation of the lower members or lays exclusive stress on intellectual dogmas, forms and ceremonies, on some fixed and rigid moral code, on some religio-political or religio-social system. Not that these things are altogether negligible or that they must be unworthy or unnecessary or that a spiritual religion need disdain the aid of forms, ceremonies, creeds or systems. On the contrary, they are needed by man because the lower members have to be exalted and raised before they can be fully spiritualised, before they can directly feel the spirit and obey its law. An intellectual formula is often needed by the thinking and reasoning mind, form or ceremony by the aesthetic temperament or other parts of the infrarational being, a set moral code by man’s vital nature in their turn towards the inner life. But these things are aids and supports, not the essence; precisely because they belong to the rational and infrarational parts, they can be nothing more and, if too blindly insisted on, may even hamper the suprarational light. Such as they are, they have to be offered to man and used by him, but not to be imposed on him as his sole law by a forced and inflexible domination. In the use of them toleration and free permission of variation is the first rule which should be observed. The spiritual essence of religion is alone the one thing supremely needful, the thing to which we have always to hold and subordinate to it every other element or motive.”

— *The Human Cycle*

Viewed in a comprehensive perspective, Materialism, the material science in particular, by exploring the mysteries of Nature and harnessing her powers for welfare and progress, has made man more and more conscious of his own potential capacity on the one hand, and, on the other hand, of the infinite possibilities and promises that are there in Nature. This increase or expansion of man’s knowledge of himself and of his environment can never be opposed to his spiritual quest. If spiritual quest leads man inward, makes him look for the inner splendours of his consciousness, the

material quest helps him to understand the phenomenon outside and around him. It is the poverty of human mind and human perception which fails to recognise the harmony between Spirit and Matter, their secret intimacy and the fact that both owe their existence to a common source.

Matter itself is a form of Spirit in which consciousness remains asleep and involved. "Matter means the involution of the conscious delight of existence in self-oblivious force and in self-dividing, infinitesimally disaggregated form of substance", says Sri Aurobindo

— (*The Synthesis of Yoga*)

It is our ignorance which does not allow us to get over the dichotomy between Matter and Spirit. But, says Sri Aurobindo, "The affirmation of a divine life upon earth and an immortal sense in mortal existence can have no base unless we recognise not only eternal Spirit as the inhabitant of this bodily mansion, the wearer of this mutable robe, but accept Matter of which it is made, as a fit and noble material out of which He weaves constantly His garbs, builds recurrently the unending series of His mansions."

— *The Life Divine*

A spiritual education, in the light of Sri Aurobindo, would naturally help the seeker to view both Spirit and Matter in a new light. For him Spirituality is an adventure with matter for its basis. For him the material or the so-called mundane world is neither false, nor illusory, but a truth, a reality though shrouded in falsehood and illusion. One seeking for Truth must change one's attitude to matter, "For this is the monstrous thing, the terrible and pitiless miracle of the material universe that out of this no-Mind a mind or, at least, minds emerge and find themselves struggling feebly for light, helpless individually, only less helpless when in self-defence they associate their individual feeblenesses in the midst of the giant Ignorance which is the law of the universe. Out of this heartless Inconscience and within its rigorous jurisdiction hearts have been born and aspire and are tortured and bleed under the weight of the blind and insentient cruelty of this iron existence, a cruelty which lays its law upon them and becomes sentient in their sentience, brutal, ferocious, horrible. But what after all, behind appearances, is this seeming mystery? We can see that it is the Consciousness which had lost itself returning again to itself, emerging out of its giant self-forgetfulness, slowly, painfully, as a Life that is would be sentient, half sentient, dimly sentient, wholly sentient and finally struggles to be more than sentient, to be again divinely self-conscious, free, infinite, immortal. But it works towards this under a law that is the opposite of all these things. Under the conditions of Matter, that is to say, against the grasp of the Ignorance. The movements it has to follow, the instruments it has to use are set and made for it by this brute and divided Matter and impose on it at every step ignorance and limitation."

— "The Knot of Matter", *The Life Divine*

A true spiritual education has to teach the students to recognise this relationship between Spirit and Matter, so that one neither looks down upon Matter and all the problems the material life presents, nor shuns Spirituality as a lesson in escapism. A spiritual education would prepare the student to face life armed with a greater faith and face with an outlook which is integral. His recognition of the problems of life will not depend entirely on their appearances; he will be able to delve deep into them and see the play of hidden forces behind them. He will be able to grow spiritually through tackling the hurdles, presented by life.

"All life is Yoga", says Sri Aurobindo, giving a radically expansive definition to the concept of Yoga. The same can be said of education; all life is education. So far as the body is concerned, at least the present human body, it grows mechanically and grows old; so far as the growth of consciousness is concerned, it waits for man's conscious aspiration and it never grows old!



In reply to a seeker's query, the Mother said, "India has or rather had the knowledge of the Spirit, but she neglected matter and suffered for it."

"The West has the knowledge of matter but rejected the Spirit and suffered badly for it."

"An integral education which could, with some variations, be adapted to all the nations of the world, must bring back the legitimate authority of the Spirit over a matter fully developed and utilised." (*Collected Works*, Vol. 13)

Spirit, in a positive form, remained in man as the soul.

".....each human being is a self-developing soul and ..... the business of both parent and teacher is to enable and to help the child to educate himself, to develop his own intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capacities and to grow freely as an organic being, not to be kneaded and pressured into form like an inert plastic material. It is not yet realised what this soul is or that the true secret, whether with child or man, is to help him to find his deeper self, the real psychic entity within. That, if we ever give it a chance to come forward, and still more if we call it into the foreground as 'the leader of the march set in our front', will itself take up most of the business of education out of our hands and develop the capacity of the psychological being towards a realisation of its potentialities of what our present mechanical view of life and man and external routine methods of dealing with them prevent us from having any experience or forming any conception."

— Sri Aurobindo : *The Human Cycle*

Commenting on this passage, Dr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar says in his *Re-thinking on Ends and Means in Education* (A lecture delivered on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the British Council Library, Chennai) : "In education, therefore, it is of the utmost importance to awaken this veiled and withdrawn soul within—as Ramakrishna awakened the inner self of Vivekananda—and make it 'the leader of the march'. Population explosion, knowledge explosion, and the threat of nuclear explosion, all seem to indicate a crisis in human civilisation. Life, knowledge, power—all threaten to destroy by their very surfeit. For what is lacking is Love, and Love fails us because our understanding is partial and defective. But for such a fuller understanding a new education centered in the soul or the psychic entity can alone have the key."

No wonder that at a certain phase in Indian history, the greatest emphasis the educational system laid was on making the student conscious of his soul. The process of learning, from this point of view, began from within.

What the teacher—who was often a Rishi or a seer—wished to see was, all the faculties, all the parts of the pupil's personality, must be governed by his soul, instead of by his crude physical desires, mental preferences or impulses. A great doctrine to which they subscribed was the doctrine of *Swadharma*. In the phenomenal world marked by multiplicity, each human being had a specific inner nature, apart from his share of the common stock of desires, emotions and passions, constituting his superficial personality, his ego-self. To transcend the ego-self and to illumine the consciousness in the splendour of the soul was looked upon as the true goal of education.

But what was most significant, this process of discovering one's *Swadharma* or inner nature and probing the soul did not mean a breaking away from the world, the trial and tribulations, challenges and risks offered by the normal life. In fact, the art of developing one's consciousness lay in one's ability to decipher numerous secret lessons which even apparently most ordinary situations in life could offer. The Upanishads and the Epics present several illustrations of this truth. The most astounding of them is the use of the battlefield by Lord Krishna to reveal the supreme spiritual secret to his dear disciple, Arjuna, on the eve of a terrible war. Another significant incident concerns the childhood of Aruni, an illustrious sage. Aruni had satisfied his guru with his mastery over the scriptures and the different lores he was required to study. Yet the master did not tell him that he had completed his course.

Then came a rainy night. The Gurukul or the Ashram school owned a plot of paddy field. The guru feared that the nearby tank might overflow into the field, submerging the tender crop to its detriment. He asked Aruni to go and ensure that the embankment between the field and the tank stood intact. Reaching the site, Aruni saw a breach in the embankment, already causing a steady flow of water into the paddy field. He tried to fill up the breach with handfuls of earth, but in vain. Without a moment's hesitation he lay down against the breach, stopping the flow. He fainted and was found by his guru and his fellow-students when the weather improved at dawn. That day, when he had fully recovered from his exhaustion, the guru told him, "Today I am satisfied that your education has been completed."

The incident illustrates how theoretical knowledge alone was not enough for one to be deemed educated. We see some distinct undercurrents beneath Aruni's action: his was an enlightened pragmatism. That is to say, not that he did not know that it was not proper to risk one's life for a temporary material gain. But he took the risk because his zeal belonged to another plane where to defy the odds and to stand up to a commitment was an ideal worth achieving, its utilitarian worth or worthlessness notwithstanding. He had conquered his ego; even though he was a scholar, he did not look upon the action he took as something inferior to his status. Education had taught him humility.

But how far is this spirit of education relevant to our time? "Education must have an end in view, for it is not an end in itself," said Sybil Marshall in *An Experiment in Education*. And if we recognise that goal to be at least helping to student to become a better human being, then the spirit in question is absolutely relevant.

The spiritual education is not a specific subject like history, geography or mathematics. It begins with the very formation of an individual's consciousness. Today the proliferation of educational institutions and the phenomenal growth in student-population have made a personal relationship between the teacher and the pupil very difficult. The students feel harassed and they don't mind harassing their educators in return.

"When the expanding youth generation comes to the academy, we expect it to master in a few years what the entire evolutionary adventure has accomplished so laboriously over all past ages. If the tasks of education were never easy, today they are bewilderingly more difficult than ever before. Too many students, alas: and too many loads of knowledge: and too meagre resources: and too little time at our disposal: and too much distraction to permit us to make really profitable use of even the available time! The aggregating situation is plainly impossible. Expansion seems already to have gone past the stage of profitable returns, and yet we feel helpless to arrest this growth, this madness, this headlong run towards racial suicide."

— Dr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar

Added to this situation are a hundred other factors, politics (by no means in a theoretical sense) making inroads into the campus, the influence of the irresponsible and anarchic explosion of vulgar entertainments through electronic and other media, etc. Where is the opportunity for spiritual education to claim their attention?

But, luckily, the key to ignite in the children a spiritual outlook is in the hands of those who have the sole monopoly of the child's attention and the sole hold on the child's time at the most important stage of the child's growth. Needless to say, they are the parents.

Next in importance, no doubt, is the teacher. Discussing with the teachers of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education the issue of teacher-student relationship and how a teacher can really exercise his or her influence on the students, the Mother said, "Teachers who are not perfectly calm, who do not have an endurance that never fails and a quietude which nothing can disturb, who have no self-respect... will get nowhere. One must be a saint and a hero to be a good teacher. One

must have a perfect attitude to demand a perfect attitude from the students. You cannot ask anyone to do what you don't do yourself. That is a rule....

"... I have never asked anyone educated here to give lessons without seeing that this would be for him the best way of disciplining himself, of learning better what he is to teach and of reaching an inner perfection he would never have if he were not a teacher and had not this opportunity of disciplining himself, which is *exceptionally* severe. Those who succeed as teachers here—I don't mean an outer, artificial and superficial success, but becoming truly good teachers—this means that they are capable of making an inner progress of impersonalisation, of eliminating their egoism, controlling their movement, capable of a clear-sightedness, an understanding of others and a never-failing patience".

(*Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 8)

In a true system of education it is not the student alone who makes progress, but the teacher too does the same.

## 6

# CONCEPT OF INTEGRAL EDUCATION

Thoreau and Emerson, both alumni of Harvard, were once reminiscing over their alma mater, in the course of which Emerson is believed to have said that the University had by now all the branches of knowledge.

“Branches are fine”, Thoreau is believed to have commented. “But what about the roots?”

The primary purpose of education, if not forgotten, had remained ignored for long. Way back in 1909, Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Karmayogin*. “The first necessity for the building up of a great intellectual superstructure is to provide a foundation strong enough to bear it. Those systems of education which start from an insufficient knowledge of man, think they have provided a satisfactory foundation when they have supplied the student with a large or well-selected mass of information on the various subjects which comprise the best part of human culture at the time. The school gives the materials, it is for the student to use them — this is the formula. But the error here is fundamental. Information cannot be the foundation of intelligence, it can only be part of the material out of which the knower builds knowledge, the starting-point, the nucleus of fresh discovery and enlarged creation. An education that confines itself to imparting knowledge, is not education. The various faculties of memory, judgement, imagination, perception, reasoning, which build the edifice of the thought and knowledge for the knower, must not only be equipped with their fit and sufficient tools and materials, but trained to bring fresh materials and use more skillfully those of which they are in possession. And the foundation of the structure they have to build, can only be the provision of a fund of force and energy sufficient to bear the demands of a continually growing activity of the memory, judgement and creative power.”

— *The Brain of India*

We find his concept of an ‘integral education’ already inherent in this passage, although the phrase was used much later by the Mother. In a series of articles published in the *Arya* in the second decade of the 20th century (subsequently compiled under the title *War and Self-Determination*), we find him laying emphasis on the child as a soul — a truth which any sound system of education must recognise, first and foremost, and then proceed to help its other faculties to develop.

“The child was in the ancient patriarchal idea the live property of the father; he was his creation, his production, his own reproduction of himself; the father, rather than God or the universal Life in place of God, stood as the author of the child’s being; and the creator has every right over his creation, the producer over his manufacture. He had the right to make of him what he willed, and not what the being of the child really was within, to train and shape and cut him according to the parental ideas and not rear him according to his own nature’s deepest needs, to bind him to the paternal career or the career chosen by the parent and not that to which his nature and capacity and inclination pointed, to fix for him all the critical turning-points of his life even after he had reached maturity. In education the child was regarded not as a soul meant to grow, but as brute psychological stuff to be shaped into a fixed mould by the teacher. We have travelled to another conception of the child as a soul with a being, a nature and capacities of his own who must be helped to find them, to find himself, to grow into their maturity, into a fullness of physical and vital

energy and the utmost breadth, depth, and height of his emotional, his intellectual and his spiritual being.”

Between the twenties and the thirties of the 20th century, Sri Aurobindo’s seer-vision encompassed the entire range of human life – with all its activities, social, political, cultural, educational, etc., so much so that we do not know of any other savant in recorded history to have tackled so many subjects at so very lofty planes. His return to the issue of education again and again was unavoidable and again and again, in different contexts, he highlighted the unique role of the soul. Reflecting on the possible contribution of education to a divine life on earth, he says :

“But it has not been found in experience, whatever might have once been hoped, that education and intellectual training by itself can change man; it only provides the human individual and collective ego with better information and a more efficient machinery for its self-affirmation, but leaves it the same unchanged human ego. Nor can human mind and life be cut into perfection, – even into what is thought to be perfection, a constructed substitute, – by any kind of social machinery; matter can be so cut, thought can be so cut, but in our human existence matter and thought are only instruments for the soul and the life-force. Machinery cannot form the soul and life-force into standardised shapes; it can at best coerce them, make soul and mind inert and stationary and regulate the life’s outward action; but if this is to be effectively done, coercion and compression of the mind and life are indispensable and that again spells either unprogressive stability or decadence. The reasoning mind with its logical practicality has no other way of getting the better of Nature’s ambiguous and complex movements than a regulation and mechanisation of mind and life. If that is done, the soul of humanity will either have to recover its freedom and growth by a revolt and a destruction of the machine into whose grip it has been cast or escape by a withdrawal into itself and a rejection of life. Man’s true way-out is to discover his soul and its self-force and instrumentation and replace by it both the mechanisation of mind and the ignorance and disorder of life-nature. But there would be little room and freedom for such a movement of self-discovery and self-effectuation in a closely regulated and mechanised social existence.”

– *The Life Divine*

Since Sri Aurobindo made this observation, mankind has witnessed several instances to corroborate it. Among many tumultuous events of the twentieth century is the World War II – revealing how fragile an assurance education and all the trappings of so-called civilized societies were against an upsurge of dark elements in man or against a hostile force taking possession of him – showing him as he is in his utter nakedness.

But when we meditate on the issue, we are most likely to arrive at an impasse. We stand convinced that the awakening of soul in man is the answer to the state of human predicament, but how to bring about the fulfilment of that condition?

There comes the relevance of Yoga.

But what is Yoga? While Yoga means union, union with the source of our being, people often understand by Yoga Hathayoga, practice of a system of physical postures, breath-control etc. to arrive at certain experience or to achieve certain powers. There are also other distinguished schools of Yoga: Rajayoga, which leads the seeker to various states of trance, Jnanayoga, a discipline to grow closer to the goal through Knowledge, Karmayoga and Bhaktiyoga which lead the seeker to the same goal through Action and Devotion respectively.

But Sri Aurobindo presents Yoga in a far more natural perspective. “In the right view of both life and Yoga, all life is either consciously or sub-consciously a Yoga”, he says and proceeds thus :

“For we mean by this term a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent Existence we see partially expressed in man and in the Cosmos. But all life, when we look behind its appearances, is a vast Yoga of Nature attempting to realise her perfection in an ever

increasing expression of her potentialities and to unite herself with her own divine reality. In man, her thinker, she for the first time upon this Earth devises self-conscious means and willed arrangements of activity by which this great purpose may be more swiftly and puissantly attained. Yoga, as Swami Vivekananda has said, may be regarded as a means of compressing one's evolution into a single life or a few years or even a few months of bodily existence."

— "Life and Yoga", *The Synthesis of Yoga*

Sri Aurobindo saw that since the different schools of Yoga aimed at one goal, one union, a synthesis could be achieved among them :

"By the very nature of the principal Yogic schools each covering in its operations a part of the complex human integer and attempting to bring out its highest possibilities, it will appear that a synthesis of all of them largely conceived and applied might well result in an integral Yoga. But they are so disparate in their tendencies, so highly specialised and elaborated in their forms, so long confirmed in the mutual opposition of their ideas and methods that we do not easily find how we can arrive at their right union."

Again, those who got a taste of the Infinite through Yoga looked upon the finite world as something almost superfluous. Since everything in this phenomenal world was subject to death and other sorts of impermanence, Yogis who grew acquainted with the indescribable glory of the Power that was beyond the universe (transcendent), developed an attitude of contempt for the things that were phenomenal.

But Yoga cannot be integral unless it found both the finite and the infinite as aspects of the same Power — call it Divine or Godhead or Brahman or the Supreme Reality. "The ultimate knowledge is that which perceives and accepts God in the universe as well as beyond the universe and the integral Yoga is that which, having found the Transcendent, can return upon the universe and possess it, retaining the power freely to descend as well as ascend the great stair of existence."

— 'Three Steps of Yoga', *The Synthesis of Yoga*

Needless to say, a concept of Integral Education is in line with the Integral Yoga, both the disciplines pointing at a progress in the direction of realising the best qualities inherent in man, an urge for perfection and thirst for knowledge and truth. Like Integral Yoga visualising not only a realisation of the soul, but also a transformation of the gross physical, vital and mental aspects of man into Divine instruments, the Integral Education intends at preparing all aspects of the students through a creative cultivation of their potentialities, to become, with full awareness and a sense of joy, vehicles of a higher consciousness. Since there is always the fear of the meaning of the phrase 'Integral Education' being diluted — for much will depend on the capacity and understanding of those who are trying to put the idea into practice and the opportunities available to them — it is necessary that those concerned do not forget its sublime goal. The Mother expects the process of integral education to help ushering in the next phase of human evolution, when man would have crossed his mind to step into the Supramental. She says, "To pursue the integral education that leads to the Supramental realisation a four fold austerity is necessary and also a four fold liberation."

'Four Austerities and Four Liberations' — The Mother

She makes it transparently clear that by austerity she does not mean asceticism or self-mortification. Far more difficult than the practice of such external methods is mastering power over one's self, "to maintain the consciousness always on the peak of its capacity and never allow the body to act under the influence of a lower impulse."

The gradation, she says, is from above downward and they need not be followed in that order mechanically — each one formulating his own system according to his capacity and personal needs.

She explains the austerities from the bottom of the list. The discipline of Beauty requires to form a programme following which one can build a body beautiful in form, harmonious in posture, supple and agile in its movements, powerful in its activities and resistant in its health and organic function.

The body, to prepare itself for receiving a higher consciousness, must follow a sound routine regarding sleep, food, physical exercise and other activities. "To reach this ideal goal one must strictly shun all excess, all vice small or big, one must deny oneself the use of such slow poisons as tobacco, alcohol, etc. which men have the habit of developing into indispensable needs that gradually demolish their will and memory."

The Mother gives more importance on the quality of sleep than the length of the period of sleep and advises to go to bed keeping the mind clear and calm. A brief meditation may help.

Exercise should be chosen keeping in mind the body's capacity and need.

And then comes the question of work. "For the man who wishes to perfect himself, there is nothing like small and big work, important work or unimportant." One can cultivate the secret of finding interest in any work one is required to do.

The result of this discipline is liberation in action. The body and the actions thereof would no longer remain in bondage to Nature's dictates, to impulses and lower desires.

Then comes the 'tapasya' of Power—observing emotional austerities. 'Vital' means the seat of life-force. "It is in the vital that thought changes into will and become a dynamism of action. It is also true that the vital is the seat of desires and passions, of violent impulses and equally violent reactions, of revolt and depression."

Generally those who do not wish to be the victims of their vital desires completely suppress them, starve them. But that is not austerity. True 'tapasya' in this aspect of our being is to utilise the senses with discrimination and discernment. "The senses should be able to bear everything without disgust or displeasure.... the senses should be utilised as instruments to approach and study the physical and vital world in all their complexity... It is by enlightening, strengthening and purifying the vital and not by weakening it that one can help towards the progress of the being."

The vital, when properly taught, can become a flame of aspiration for the higher life. Liberation from desire will obtain for the seeker peace, serenity and power.

Coming to the *tapasya* of Knowledge, the Mother lays great emphasis on the need for right speech. "Man is the first animal upon earth to be able to use the articulate sound. He is indeed proud of it and exercises this capacity without measure or discrimination. The world is deafened with the noise of his speech and at times you almost seem to miss the harmonious silence of the vegetable kingdom", she says.

True knowledge can be gathered in silence, not through arguments and assertion. There prevails a general impression that those belonging to the academic or intellectual fraternity are more reasonable than the average man in their speech. The Mother says, "It is nothing of the kind, however; for even here, into this home of ideas and knowledge, man has introduced violence of his convictions, sectarian intolerance, passion of preference."

Mental austerity is a great discipline; control over one's speech is far more important than keeping mum. Often people pass judgement over others. But how much does one know oneself that he should judge someone else?

"Be silent in your mind, keep steady in the true attitude, that of constant aspiration towards the All-Wisdom, the All-Knowledge and the All-Consciousness. Then, if your aspiration is sincere, if it is not a mere cover for your ambition to do things well and to be successful, if it is pure, spontaneous and integral, then you will speak simply, you will utter the words that should be uttered, neither more nor less, and they will possess a creative power," she answers.

This discipline will liberate one from ignorance.

Last is the *tapasya* of Love. This emotion or passion is generally looked upon as irresistible. Through so many social and moral rules and laws man has tried to keep this emotion under control, but in vain.

But, the true love, the Divine Love, of which the human passion of love is only a caricature, a distortion, alone can bring about man's ultimate union with his source, the Divine.

"One who has known Divine Love, finds all other love obscure, mixed with smallness and egoism and darkness. It looks like a bargain or a struggle for superiority and authority: and even in the best of men, it is full of misunderstanding and sensitiveness, frictions and misgivings."

"Besides, it is a well-known fact that you grow into the likeness of that which you love. If therefore you want to be like the Divine, love Him alone. One who has experienced the ecstasy of the communion of love with the Divine can alone know how insipid, dull and feeble all other love is, in comparison. And even if the most austere discipline is needed to arrive at this communion, nothing is too hard, too long, too severe, provided it takes you there; for it surpasses all expression."

"It is this wonderful state that we wish to realise upon earth; it is this which will transform the world and make it a habitation worthy of the Divine Presence..."

— The Mother : *On Education*

An integral education will recognise the individual not as a vague combination of matter (body) and spirit, but a personality having four distinct aspects: (a) Physical, (b) Vital, (c) Mental and (d) Psychic. An ideal system of education must open up avenues for the best possible development of each of these faculties of the student.

In a right environment, the inner being of the student, the soul, the psychic, must dominate the other aspects of his being. That will ensure harmonious growth of the person.

Each child is unique. Creation finds a delight in variety and multiplicity. Hence, clubbing a group of students together and judging them applying a common, mechanical yardstick is wrong. Each one has a possibility, a hidden capacity, a talent. Environment and opportunity must be created for that latent quality to blossom.

Man as he is, is not the final product of Evolution. Sri Aurobindo visualises the advent of a new man. The mental man must prepare to pave the way for the advent of the Supramental man. The mental man will be transformed into or evolve into the new being.

The syllabus for Integral Education is all life—and promises that are there beyond the present conditions of life—and behind the appearances of life. For it neither matter nor spirit is unreal, but the traditional dichotomy between them is unreal.



## EXPERIMENTS IN INTEGRAL EDUCATION

One of the most recent forms under which Sri Aurobindo conceived of the development of his work was to establish at Pondicherry an International University Centre open to students from all over the world.

“It is considered that the most fitting memorial to his name would be to found this University now so as to give concrete expression to the fact that his work continues with unabated vigour”, said the Mother in 1951 and on the 6th of January 1952 the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre was inaugurated — its name changed, in 1959, in order to keep itself free from the conventional ideas which go with a University, to Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.

The Centre of Education consists of sections from Kindergarten till the Higher Course — which approximates to the graduation level in other colleges. But the system of learning and teaching here being very flexible, in principle a student can qualify himself much more than a graduate, if he is sincere and of the right aptitude.

Flexibility, indeed, is one of the cardinal virtues of this institution. There are no mechanical promotions taking into consideration a certain average performance of the student. If a student is observed to be better in a particular subject than expected at his level, he can very well be in a higher class in that particular subject.

The Centre of Education has these faculties : Humanities, Languages, Science and Engineering Technology. There are well-organised provisions for learning painting, music and dance (both Indian and Western), dramatics, crafts, practical ecology etc. Libraries and laboratories are well-equipped.

Physical education is given great importance. Facilities are there for athletics, gymnastics, exercises, combatives, aquatics and field games. A daily routine of activities is formulated for all the students.

Contests and tournaments continue throughout the year, but in a spirit of progress and not in the conventional sense of competition. Playground, sports ground, swimming pool etc. are maintained with great care.

The objectives of the Centre of Education are :

1. to evolve and realise a system of integral education and to make it a dynamic ideal for society;
2. to organise an environment and an atmosphere affording inspiration and facilities for the exercise and development of the five essential aspects of personality: the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual;
3. to emphasise the unity of all knowledge and to attempt to bring Humanities and Science closer together into a real sense of unity for the benefit of both;
4. to develop the sense of the oneness of mankind and international collaboration; and
5. to prepare for the role that India has to play in the formation of the new international harmony.

The Centre of Education does not award degrees. The Mother explains why it is so :

“For the last hundred years or so mankind has been suffering from a disease which seems to be spreading more and more and which has reached a climax in our times; it is what we may call

'utilitarianism'. People and things, circumstances and activities seem to be viewed and appreciated exclusively from this angle. Nothing has any value unless it is useful. Certainly something that is useful is better than something that is not. But first we must agree on what we describe as useful – useful to whom, to what, for what ?"

"For, more and more, the races who consider themselves civilised describe as useful whatever can attract, procure or produce money. Everything is judged and evaluated from a monetary angle. That is what I call utilitarianism. And this disease is highly contagious, for even children are not immune to it."

"At an age when they should be dreaming of beauty, greatness and perfection, dreams that may be too sublime for ordinary common sense, but which are nevertheless far superior to this dull good sense, children now dream of money and worry about how to earn it."

"So when they think of their studies, they think above all about what can be useful to them, so that later on when they grow up they can earn a lot of money."

And the thing that becomes most important for them is to prepare themselves to pass examinations with success, for with diplomas, certificates and titles they will be able to find good position and earn a lot of money.

For them study has no other purpose, no other interest.

To learn for the sake of knowledge, to study in order to know the secrets of Nature and life, to educate oneself in order to grow in consciousness, to discipline oneself in order to become master of oneself, to overcome one's weaknesses, incapacities and ignorance, to prepare oneself to advance in life towards a goal that is nobler and vaster, more generous and more true... they hardly give it a thought and consider it all very utopian. The only thing that matters is to be practical, to prepare themselves and learn how to earn money.

Children who are infected with this disease are out of place at the Centre of Education of the Ashram. And it is to make this quite clear to them that we do not prepare them for any official examination or competition and do not give them any diplomas or titles which they can use in the outside world.

We want here only those who aspire for a higher and better life, who thirst for knowledge and perfection, who look forward eagerly to a future that will be more totally true.

"There is plenty of room in the world for all the others."

Pavitra, a French savant whose original name was P. B. Saint-Hilaire, who was the Director of the Centre of Education, wrote :

"It is quite clear that, according to Sri Aurobindo, the current idea that the teacher should impart his knowledge – what he knows about a subject – to a child is fundamentally wrong. He must show the child how to learn that subject by himself, help him in devising his own methods of learning and of organizing the knowledge which he gathers or discovers.

"We can understand this better if we observe how a young child gains spontaneously the knowledge of his surroundings. He does it through a ceaseless activity which is natural to him whenever he finds interest in the objects at his disposal. He examines, touches, manipulates every object he can lay his hand upon, studies how he can use it for his own purposes (often very different from his parents' ends and views). He explores every nook and corner of the room, of the house, of the garden, sees how he can make use of them for his activities, his games (with little care for the purpose and the tranquility of the grown-ups). All this is done and pursued in conformity with the needs of his stage of growth. It is the learning by doing, as named by Dewey. When we say that a child is amusing himself or playing (alone or with playmates), it is almost always the purposeful activity (alone or with playmates), it is almost always the purposeful activity (solitary or collective) of a growing being deeply engaged in the process of building up and perfecting his instruments of knowledge and action. We are indeed in presence of a genuine education, leading to discovery and invention – discovery of the world around and of its meaning (for the child's mentality), invention

of the usage he can put it to (for the child's aims and interests) — and it is a self-education as it does not require lectures or books. An adult's intervention is in most cases not sought for, nor is it effective, as the adult's understanding is too remote from the child's mentality.

"But the adult has an important part to fulfil. When a child is idle, restless or mischievous, it is either that his natural activity has been hampered or distorted, or that he had exhausted the opportunities given to him by his surroundings and his activity has no outlet. It is for the adult — parent or teacher — to keep the environment supplied with elements of interest. These objects should act by their presence, not by their purpose. Their aim is to satisfy an immediate and actual need of the child, not a future need as anticipated by the parent or teacher (pass an exam, get a good job, raise a family). The purpose of a child is always immediate : the satisfaction of an actual need, which is one of the forms taken by the deep fundamental urge in him to grow physically, emotionally and mentally. He does not paint with the aim of becoming an artist (such an aim belongs to the adult mentality, but it is often unwisely and untimely instilled into a child's receptive mind), but for the satisfaction of the creative impulse in him. He does not try to solve a problem of mathematics to become a mathematician or a good engineer, or even to know geometry and algebra, but for the satisfaction of the discovery, the lightning that suddenly flashes into his mind when he gets it, for the inner joy of having overcome a difficulty and succeeded. He does not play the mouth organ to have a large audience and be recognized as a musician (if he has these ambitions, he got them by the praises bestowed upon him by elders), but for the joy of self-expression and the pleasure he gives to his nearest mates and friends."

A salient feature of the educational methods followed here is known as the Free Progress stream. The Mother says, "Free Progress is progress guided by the soul and not subjected to habits, conventions and preconceived ideas."

According to the Centre's brochure :

"All education aims at the progress of the individual."

But the basic question is : What is progress ? For the word 'progress' can and does have many meanings and implications widely differing in their content and scope.

The view the Centre takes is that progress is essentially a growth of consciousness, discovery and increasing awareness of an inner power and principle of guidance, which holds in it the light and truth of the development, harmony and perfection of our body, life and mind. It could be said that true progress is an ever-open step towards a total evolution of our entire being and consciousness so as to transcend and transform all the limitations to which man as an evolutionary being is at present subject. And this can only be done by a constant living contact with man's true self, the soul.

And once we accept this view, it would then be irrational to set a standard of progress which is uniform for all. It would be wiser although more difficult, to consider each individual as a special centre having his own unique rhythms and modes of progress and thus to assess each individual's progress by standards appropriate to him. Moreover, "If the individual can progress at his maximum, the group will necessarily benefit by it. If the individual is submitted to the possibility and capacity of the group, he loses his chance to total progress", says the Mother.

On this basis, education would become a process of free growth and not a rigid system. For, if man is not the last term of evolution, if reason is not the true or highest governor of life, if the aim of human life is to discover one's inmost and highest principles and to transform by their light and power the entire mode of one's present embodied mental life, and if the specific aim of each individual is to be a special or unique centre of a higher action, then education must be a process of Free Progress.

Some features of the Free Progress approach are :

1. The structure is oriented towards the meeting of the varied needs of the students, each one of whom has his own special pace and process of development.
2. It is not merely the 'subjects' of study that should count in education; the aspiration, the need for growth, the experience of freedom, the possibility of educating oneself, of self-experimentation, the discovery of the inner needs and their relation with the programme of studies, and the discovery of the aim of life and the art of life – these are much more important and the structure of the organisation must provide for them.
3. As he grows older, the student has an increasing freedom in the choice of his subjects and the organisation of his time; but his freedom has to be luminously *guided*. The student should experience freedom but it might be *misused*; the student has therefore to be watched with care, sympathy and wisdom.
4. A great stress falls upon the *individual work* of the students. This individual work may be the result of the student's own choice to follow a particular topic of interest; or it may be the result of a suggestion from the teacher but accepted by the student. It may be a follow-up of something explained by the teacher or it may be an original line of inquiry. The essential aim is to encourage and stimulate the student to find genuine interest and joy in work.
5. This individual work may be pursued in several ways :
  - a. quiet reflection or meditation;
  - b. referring to books or relevant portions of books suggested by the teacher;
  - c. working on specific exercises/texts prepared for the student by the teacher;
  - d. consultation or interviews; and
  - e. carrying out experiments.
6. Apart from individual work, the student participates in group classes as these also have their value. In addition, lectures are organised; such lectures seek appeal to the sense of discovery, imagination and creativity in the student, and not merely burden him with information.
7. There are also periods of discussion between teachers and students and between students and students. However, the discussions need not pertain merely to academic subjects; they can centre round the individual needs of growth and thus provide an opportunity for guiding the students in their inner search.
8. There are topics which more easily yield to the project system. Teachers therefore announce a number of projects in these subjects and students according to their individual or group choice select a few on which they work individually or collectively and produce charts, monographs, designs, etc. which are periodically exhibited for the benefit of others.
9. The role of the teacher in this process of education may be summarised as follows :
  - a. to aid the student in uncovering the inner will to grow and to progress – that needs to be the constant endeavour of the teacher,
  - b. to evolve a programme of education for each student in accordance with the felt needs of the student's growth,
  - c. to watch the students with deep sympathy, understanding and patience, ready to intervene and guide as and when necessary,
  - d. to stimulate the student with striking words, ideas, questions, stories, projects and programmes – this should be the main work of the teacher. The teacher must be a friend and a guide, must not impose himself, but may intervene when necessary. The wastage of opportunities given should not be allowed indefinitely. But when and how to intervene depends on the discretion of the teacher. To radiate inner calm and cheerful dynamism so as to create an atmosphere conducive to the development of

higher faculties of inner knowledge and institution – that may be regarded as the heart of the work of the teacher.

10. An adequate organisation for the proper working of the free progress approach would need the following :
  - a. A room or rooms of silence to which students who like to do uninterrupted work or would like to reflect or meditate in silence can go as and when they like ;
  - b. Rooms of documentation where students can find the required materials to seek answers to their questions;
  - c. Rooms for study, group discussion, consultation.
11. In this view of education, there is no rivalry amongst various branches or disciplines of knowledge, or any stress of their relative importance. In the study of each subject, the aim and attempt is so directed that it leads towards a discovery of the fundamental truths underlying the subject and progressively towards a larger discovery of the unity underlying these truths and the truths of other branches of knowledge, thus helping in the progressive growth of the consciousness of the student.

This sense of the unity of the truths would contribute to the reconciliation of the various branches of knowledge, thus leading to the harmony of Science, Philosophy, Technology and Fine Arts.

This evidently demands a certain maturity and a sense of responsibility. Though the training of the mental faculties begins much earlier, it is only after the age of fourteen that a child is in a position to derive the full benefit from the free progress approach.

In its essence, the free progress approach is endlessly open and innovative and the foregoing should not be taken as rigidly binding.

Experiments and adventures in education in the light of Sri Aurobindo's thoughts are carried out at several other places, within their limitations.

A major field of such experiments is Auroville, not far from Pondicherry. To a question what system of education Auroville proposes to follow, a teacher, Yvonne Artand says: "It is less a system than an environment. We want to give everyone, and especially our children, the possibility of living in an environment which constantly helps them to evolve and to become that which they can become when there is no difference between school and home or between study and play.

"The learning process will no longer be something which is turned on from 7.30 to 11.30 a.m., but the natural attitude of a normally developed mind in this universe during its whole life, an attitude of inquiry, a joy of knowing, and a joy of being and of being able to do."

To another question on the nature of their syllabus, she says, "Our syllabus is the same as that of evolution. Evolution has deposited in the DNA chains of each of us a syllabus, a programme, and given us the possibility of becoming more than our parents were. We intend to help our children to find this programming in themselves, and then to realize it. Like evolution, we want them to become more than man – 'Afterman'."

## PART II

# Series Reproduced

- (A) The series by Sri Aurobindo, bearing the title “A System of National Education”, was first published in the *Karmayogin* (Calcutta) in 1910, before Sri Aurobindo came over Pondicherry. They were published as a book in 1921. In a subsequent edition published in 1924, the Publishers’ note said: “They are, however, incomplete and the subject of national education proper had not been touched except in certain allusions. The book, as it stands, consists of a number of introductory essays insisting on certain general principles of a sound system of teaching applicable for the most part of national education in any country. As such it may stand as a partial introduction to the subject of national education in India. However, by now the series has been widely read even in its incomplete form and has influenced the thinking of educationists.”
- (B) The Mother’s articles, originally written in French, were published in English first in the *Bulletin* of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry. They constitute the basis of Integral Education.

# The Human Mind

The true basis of education is the study of the human mind – infant, adolescent and adult. Any system of education founded on theories of academic perfection, which ignores the instrument of study, is more likely to hamper and impair intellectual growth than to produce a perfect and perfectly equipped mind. For the educationist has to do, not with dead material like the artist or sculptor, but with an infinitely subtle and sensitive organism. He cannot shape an educational masterpiece out of human wood or stone; he has to work in the elusive substance of mind and respect the limits imposed by the fragile human body.

There can be no doubt that the current educational system of Europe is a great advance on many of the methods of antiquity, but its defects are also palpable. It is based on an insufficient knowledge of human psychology, and it is only safeguarded in Europe from disastrous results by the refusal of the ordinary student to subject himself to the processes it involves, his habit of studying only so much as he must to avoid punishment or to pass an immediate test, his resort to active habits and vigorous physical exercise. In India the disastrous effects of the system on body, mind and character are only too apparent. The first problem in a national system of education is to give an education as comprehensive as the European and more thorough, without the evils of strain and cramming. This can only be done by studying the instruments of knowledge and finding a system of teaching which shall be natural, easy and effective. It is only by strengthening and sharpening these instruments to their utmost capacity that they can be made effective for the increased work which modern conditions require. The muscles of the mind must be thoroughly trained by simple and easy means; then, and not till then, great feats of intellectual strength can be required of them.

The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or task-master, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil's mind, he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process. He does not impart knowledge to him, he shows him how to acquire knowledge for himself. He does not call forth the knowledge that is within; he only shows him where it lies and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface. The distinction that reserves this principle for the teaching of adolescent and adult minds and denies its application to the child, is a conservative and unintelligent doctrine. Child or man, boy or girl, there is only one sound principle of good teaching. Difference of age only serves to diminish or increase the amount of help and guidance necessary; it does not change its nature.

The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the parent or teacher is a barbarous and ignorant superstition. It is he himself who must be induced to expand in accordance with his own nature. There can be no greater error than for the parent to arrange beforehand that his son shall develop particular qualities, capacities, ideas, virtues, or be prepared for a prearranged career. To force the nature to abandon its own *dharma* is to do it permanent harm, mutilate its growth and deface its perfection. It is a selfish tyranny over a human soul and a wound to the nation, which loses the benefit of the best that a man could have given it and is forced to accept instead something imperfect and artificial, second-rate, perfunctory and common. Every one has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of perfection and strength in however small a sphere which God offers

him to take or refuse. The task is to find it, develop it and use it. The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use.

The third principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be. The basis of a man's nature is almost always, in addition to his soul's past, his heredity, his surroundings, his nationality, his country, the soil from which he draws sustenance, the air which he breathes, the sights, sounds, habits to which he is accustomed. They mould him not the less powerfully because insensibly, and from that then we must begin. We must not take up the nature by the roots from the earth in which it must grow or surround the mind with images and ideas of a life which is alien to that in which it must physically move. If anything has to be brought in from outside, it must be offered, not forced on the mind. A free and natural growth is the condition of genuine development. There are souls which naturally revolt from their surroundings and seems to belong to another age and clime. Let them be free to follow their bent; but the majority languish, become empty, become artificial, if artificially moulded into an alien form. It is God's arrangement that they should belong to a particular nation, age, society, that they should be children of the past, possessors of the present, creators of the future. The past is our foundation, the present our material, the future our aim and summit. Each must have its due and natural place in a national system of education.



# The Powers of the Mind

The instrument of the educationist is the mind or *antaJhkarana*, which consists of four layers. The reservoir of past mental impressions, the 'citta' or storehouse of memory, which must be distinguished from the specific act of memory, is the foundation on which all the other layers stand. All experience lies within us as passive or potential memory; active memory selects and takes what it requires from that storehouse. But the active memory is like a man searching among a great mass of locked-up material; sometimes he cannot find what he wants; often in his rapid search he stumbles across many things for which he has not immediate need; often too he blunders and thinks he has found the real thing when it is something else, irrelevant if not valueless, on which he has laid his hand. The passive memory or *citta* needs no training, it is automatic and naturally sufficient to its task; there is not the slightest object of knowledge coming within its field which is not secured, placed and faultlessly preserved in that admirable receptacle. It is the active memory, a higher but less perfectly developed function, which is in need of improvement.

The second layer is the mind proper or *manas*, the sixth sense of our Indian psychology, in which all the others are gathered up. The function of the mind is to receive the images of things translated into sight, sound, smell, taste and touch, the five senses and translate these again into thought-sensations. It receives also images of its own direct grasping and forms them into mental impressions. These sensations and impressions are the material of thought, not thought itself; but it is exceedingly important that thought should work on sufficient and perfect material. It is, therefore, the first business of the educationist to develop in the child the right use of the six senses; to see that they are not stunted or injured by disuse, but trained by the child himself under the teacher's direction to that perfect accuracy and keen subtle sensitiveness of which he is capable. In addition, whatever assistance can be gained by the organs of action, should be thoroughly employed. The hand, for instance, should be trained to reproduce what the eye sees and the mind senses. The speech should be trained to a perfect expression of the knowledge the whole *antaJhkarana* possesses.

The third layer is the intellect or 'buddhi', which is the real instrument of thought and that which orders and disposes of the knowledge acquired by the other parts of the machine. For the purpose of the educationist this is infinitely the most important of the three I have named. The intellect is an organ composed of several groups of functions, divisible into two important classes, the functions and faculties of the right-hand, the functions and faculties of the left-hand. The faculties of the right-hand are comprehensive, creative and synthetic; the faculties of the left-hand critical and analytic. To the right-hand belong judgment, imagination, memory, observation; to the left-hand comparison and reasoning. The critical faculties distinguish, compare, classify, generalise, deduce, infer, conclude; they are the component parts of the logical reason. The right-hand faculties comprehend, command, judge in their own right, grasp, hold and manipulate. The right-hand mind is the master of the knowledge, the left-hand its servant. The left-hand touches only the body of knowledge, the right-hand penetrates its soul. The left-hand limits itself to ascertained truth, the right-hand grasps that which is still elusive or unascertained. Both are essential to the completeness of the human reason. These important functions of the machine have all to be raised to their highest and finest working-power, if the education of the child is not to be imperfect and one-sided.

There is a fourth layer of faculty which, not as yet entirely developed in man, is attaining gradually to a wider development and more perfect evolution. The powers peculiar to this highest stratum of knowledge are chiefly known to us from the phenomena of genius, – sovereign discernment, intuitive perception of truth, plenary inspiration of speech, direct vision of knowledge to an extent often amounting to revelation, making a man a prophet of truth. These powers are rare in their higher development, though many possess them imperfectly or by flashes. They are still greatly distrusted by the critical reason of mankind because of the admixture of error, caprice and a biased imagination which obstructs and distorts their perfect workings. Yet it is clear that humanity could not have advanced to its present stage if it had not been for the help of these faculties, and it is a question with which educationists have not yet grappled, what is to be done with this mighty and baffling element, the element of genius in the pupil. The mere instructor does his best to discourage and stifle genius, the more liberal teacher welcomes it. Faculties so important to humanity cannot be left out of our consideration. It is foolish to neglect them. Their imperfect development must be perfected, the admixture of error, caprice and biased fancifulness must be carefully and wisely removed. But the teacher cannot do it; he would eradicate the good corn as well as the tares if he interfered. Here, as in all educational operations, he can only put the growing soul into the way of its own perfection.

# The Moral Nature

In the economy of man the mental nature rests upon the moral, and the education of the intellect divorced from the perfection of the moral and emotional nature is injurious to human progress. Yet, while it is easy to arrange some kind of curriculum or syllabus which will do well enough for the training of the mind, it has not yet been found possible to provide under modern conditions a suitable moral training for the school and college. The attempt to make boys moral and religious by the teaching of moral and religious text-books is a vanity and a delusion, precisely because the heart is not the mind and to instruct the mind does not necessarily improve the heart. It would be an error to say that it has no effect. It throws certain seeds of thoughts into the anta]hkara]na and, if these thoughts become habitual, they influence the conduct. But the danger of moral text-books is that they make the thinking of high things mechanical and artificial, and whatever is mechanical and artificial is inoperative for good.

There are three things which are of the utmost importance in dealing with a man's moral nature, the emotions, the *sa=msk"aras* or formed habits and associations, and the *svabh"ava* or nature. The only way for him to train himself morally is to habituate himself to the right emotions, the noblest associations, the best mental, emotional and physical habits and the following out in right action of the fundamental impulses of his essential nature. You can impose a certain discipline on children, dress them into a certain mould, lash them into a desired path, but unless you can get their hearts and natures on your side, the conformity to this imposed rule becomes a hypocritical and heartless, a conventional, often a cowardly compliance. This is what is done in Europe, and it leads to that remarkable phenomenon known as the sowing of wild oats as soon as the yoke of discipline at school and at home is removed, and to the social hypocrisy which is so large a feature of European life. Only what the man admires and accepts, becomes part of himself; the rest is a mask. He conforms to the discipline of society as he conformed to the moral routine of home and school, but considers himself at liberty to guide his real life, inner and private, according to his own likings and passions. On the other hand, to neglect moral and religious education altogether is to corrupt the race. The notorious moral corruption in our young men previous to the saving touch of the Swadeshi movement was the direct result of the purely mental instruction given to them under the English system of education. The adoption of the English system under an Indian disguise in institutions like the Central Hindu College is likely to lead to the European result. That it is better than nothing, is all that can be said for it.

As in the education of the mind, so in the education of the heart, the best way is to put the child on the right road to his own perfection and encourage him to follow it, watching, suggesting, helping, but not interfering. The one excellent element in the English boarding school is that the master at his best stands there as a moral guide and example, leaving the boys largely to influence and help each other in following the path silently shown to them. But the method practised is crude and marred by the excess of outer discipline, for which the pupils have no respect except that of fear and the exiguity of the inner assistance. The little good that is done is outweighed by much evil. The old Indian system of the *guru* commanding by his knowledge and sanctity the implicit obedience, perfect admiration, reverent emulation of the student was a far superior method of moral discipline.

It is impossible to restore that ancient system; but it is not impossible to substitute the wise friend, guide and helper for the hired instructor or the benevolent policeman which is all that the European system usually makes of the pedagogue.

The first rule of moral training is to suggest and invite, not command or impose. The best method of suggestion is by personal example, daily converse and the books read from day to day. These books should contain, for the younger student, the lofty examples of the past given, not as moral lessons, but as things of supreme human interest, and, for the elder student, the great thoughts of great souls, the passages of literature which set fire to the highest emotions and prompt the highest ideals and aspirations, the records of history and biography which exemplify the living of those great thoughts, noble emotions and aspiring ideals. This is a kind of good company, *satsa<nga*, which can seldom fail to have effect so long as sententious sermonising is avoided, and becomes of the highest effect if the personal life of the teacher is itself moulded by the great things he places before his pupils. It cannot, however, have full force unless the young life is given an opportunity, within its limited sphere, of embodying in action the moral impulses which rise within it. The thirst of knowledge, the self-devotion, the purity, the renunciation of the Brahmin, — the courage, ardour, honour, nobility, chivalry, patriotism of the Kshatriya, — the beneficence, skill, industry, generous enterprise and large open-handedness of the Vaisya, — the self-effacement and loving service of the Sudra, — these are the qualities of the Aryan. They constitute the moral temper we desire in our young men, in the whole nation. But how can we get them if we do not give opportunities to the young to train themselves in the Aryan tradition, to form by the practice and familiarity of childhood and boyhood the stuff of which their adult lives must be made ?

Every boy should, therefore, be given practical opportunity as well as intellectual encouragement to develop all that is best in the nature. If he has bad qualities, bad habits, bad *sa=msk"aras*, whether of mind or body, he should not be treated harshly as a delinquent, but encouraged to get rid of them by the Rajayogic method of *sa=myama*, rejection and substitution. He should be encouraged to think of them, not as sins or offences, but as symptoms of a curable disease, alterable by a steady and sustained effort of the will, — falsehood being rejected whenever it rises into the mind and replaced by truth, fear by courage, selfishness by sacrifice and renunciation, malice by love. Great care will have to be taken that unformed virtues are not rejected as faults. The wildness and recklessness of many young natures are only the overflowings of an excessive strength, greatness and nobility. They should be purified, nor discouraged.

I have spoken of morality; it is necessary to speak a word of religious teaching. There is a strange idea prevalent that by merely teaching the dogmas of religion children can be made pious and moral. This is an European error, and its practice either leads to mechanical acceptance of a creed having no effect on the inner and little on the outer life, or it creates the fanatic, the pietist, the ritualist or the unctuous hypocrite. Religion has to be lived, not learned as a creed. The singular compromise made in the so-called National Education of Bengal making the teaching of religious beliefs compulsory, but forbidding the practice of *anujs/th"ana* or religious exercise, is a sample of the ignorant confusion which distracts men's minds on this subject. The prohibition is a sop to secularism declared or concealed. No religious teaching is of any value unless it is lived, and the use of various kind of *s"adhan"a*, spiritual self-training and exercise is the only effective preparation for religious living. The ritual of prayer, homage, ceremony is craved for by many minds as an essential preparation and, if not made an end in itself, is a great help to spiritual progress; if it is withheld, some other form of meditation, devotion or religious duty must be put in its place. Otherwise, religious teaching is of little use and would almost be better ungiven.

But whether distinct teaching in any form of religion is imparted or not, the essence of religion, to live for God, for humanity, for country, for others and for oneself in these, must be made the ideal in every school which calls itself national. It is this spirit of Hinduism pervading our schools which — far more than the teaching of Indian subjects, the use of Indian methods or formal

instruction in Hindu beliefs and Hindu scriptures—should be the essence of Nationalism in our schools distinguishing them from all others.

# Simultaneous and Successive Teaching

A very remarkable feature of modern training which has been subjected in India to a *reductio ad absurdum* is the practice of teaching by snippets. A subject is taught a little at a time, in conjunction with a host of others, with the result that what might be well learnt in a single year is badly learned in seven and the boy goes out ill-equipped, served with imperfect parcels of knowledge, master of none of the great departments of human knowledge. The system of education adopted by the National Council, an amphibious and two-natured creation, attempts to heighten this practice of teaching by snippets at the bottom and the middle and suddenly change it to a grandiose specialism at the top. This is to base the triangle on its apex and hope that it will stand.

The old system was to teach one or two subjects well and thoroughly and then proceed to others, and certainly it was a more rational system than the modern. If it did not impart so much varied information, it built up a deeper, nobler and more real culture. Much of the shallowness, discursive lightness and fickle mutability of the average modern mind is due to the vicious principle of teaching by snippets. The one defect that can be alleged against the old system was that the subject earliest learned might fade from the mind of the student while he was mastering his later studies. But the excellent training given to the memory by the ancients obviated the incidence of this defect. In the future education we need not bind ourselves either by the ancient or the modern system, but select only the most perfect and rapid means of mastering knowledge.

In defence of the modern system it is alleged that the attention of children is easily tired and cannot be subjected to the strain of long application to a single subject. The frequent change of subject gives rest to the mind. The question naturally arises : are the children of modern times then so different from the ancients, and, if so, have we not made them so by discouraging prolonged concentration? A very young child cannot, indeed, apply himself; but a very young child is unfit for school teaching of any kind. A child of seven or eight, and that is the earliest permissible age for the commencement of any regular kind of study, is capable of a good deal of concentration if he is interested. Interest is, after all, the basis of concentration. We make his lessons supremely uninteresting and repellent to the child, a harsh compulsion the basis of teaching and then complain of his restless inattention! The substitution of a natural self-education by the child for the present unnatural system will remove this objection of inability. A child, like a man, if he is interested, much prefers to get to the end of his subject rather than leave it unfinished. To lead him on step by step, interesting and absorbing him in each as it comes, until he has mastered his subject is the true art of teaching.

The first attention of the teacher must be given to the medium and the instruments, and, until these are perfected, to multiply subjects of regular instruction is to waste time and energy. When the mental instruments are sufficiently developed to acquire a language easily and swiftly, that is the time to introduce him to many languages, not when he can only partially understand what he is taught and masters it laboriously and imperfectly. Moreover, one who has mastered his own language, has one very necessary facility for mastering another. With the linguistic faculty unsatisfactorily developed in one's own tongue, to master others is impossible. To study science with the faculties of observation, judgement, reasoning and comparison only slightly developed is to undertake a useless and thankless labour. So it is with all other subjects.

The mother-tongue is the proper medium of education and therefore the first energies of the child should be directed to the thorough mastering of the medium. Almost every child has an imagination, an instinct for words, a dramatic faculty, a wealth of idea and fancy. These should be interested in the literature and history of the nation. Instead of stupid and dry spelling and reading books, looked on as a dreary and ungrateful task, he should be introduced by rapidly progressive stages to the most interesting parts of his own literature and the life around him and behind him, and they should be put before him in such a way as to attract and appeal to the qualities of which I have spoken. All other study at this period should be devoted to the perfection of the mental functions and the moral character. A foundation should be laid at this time for the study of history, science, philosophy, art, but not in an obtrusive and formal manner. Every child is a lover of interesting narrative, a hero-worshipper and a patriot. Appeal to these qualities in him and through them let him master without knowing it, the living and human parts of his nation's history. Every child is an inquirer, an investigator, analyser, a merciless anatomist. Appeal to those qualities in him and let him acquire without knowing it the right temper and the necessary fundamental knowledge of the scientist. Every child has an insatiable intellectual curiosity and turn for metaphysical enquiry. Use it to draw him on slowly to an understanding of the world and himself. Every child has the gift of imitation and a touch of imaginative power. Use it to give him the groundwork of the faculty of the artist.

It is by allowing Nature to work that we get the benefit of the gifts she has bestowed on us. Humanity in its education of children has chosen to thwart and hamper her processes and, by so doing, has done much to thwart and hamper the rapidity of its onward march. Happily, saner ideas are now beginning to prevail. But the way has not yet been found. The past hangs about our necks with all its prejudices and errors and will not leave us; it enters into our most radical attempts to return to the guidance of the all-wise Mother. We must have the courage to take up clearer knowledge and apply it fearlessly in the interests of posterity. Teaching by snippets must be relegated to the lumber-room of dead sorrows. The first work is to interest the child in life, work and knowledge, to develop his instruments of knowledge with the utmost thoroughness, to give him mastery of the medium he must use. Afterwards, the rapidity with which he will learn will make up for any delay in taking up regular studies, and it will be found that, where now he learns a few things badly, then he will learn many things thoroughly well.

# The Training of the Senses

There are six senses which minister to knowledge, sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste, mind, and all of these except the last look outward and gather the material of thought from outside through the physical nerves and their end organs, eye, ear, nose, skin, palate. The perfection of the senses as ministers to thought must be one of the first cares of the teacher. The two things that are needed of the senses are accuracy and sensitiveness. We must first understand what are the obstacles to the accuracy and sensitiveness of the senses, in order that we may take the best steps to remove them. The cause of imperfection must be understood by those who desire to bring about perfection.

The senses depend for their accuracy and sensitiveness on the unobstructed activity of the nerves which are the channels of their information and the passive acceptance of the mind which is the recipient. In themselves the organs do their work perfectly, the eye gives the right form, the ear the correct sound, the palate the right taste, the skin the right touch, the nose the right smell. This can easily be understood if we study the action of the eye as a crucial example, a correct image is reproduced automatically on the retina, if there is any error in appreciating it, it is not the fault of the organ, but of something else.

The fault may be with the nerve currents. The nerves are nothing but channels, they have no power in themselves to alter the information given by the organs. But a channel may be obstructed and the obstruction may interfere either with the fullness or the accuracy of the information, not as it reaches the organ where it is necessarily and automatically perfect, but as it reaches the mind. The only exception is in case of a physical defect in the organ as an instrument. That is not a matter for the educationist, but for the physician.

If the obstruction is such as to stop the information reaching the mind at all, the result is an insufficient sensitiveness of the senses. The defects of sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste, anesthesia in its various degrees, are curable when not the effect of physical injury or defect in the organ itself. The obstructions can be removed and the sensitiveness remedied by the purification of the nerve system. The remedy is a simple one which is now becoming more and more popular in Europe for different reasons and objects, the regulation of the breathing. This process inevitably restores the perfect and unobstructed activity of the channels and, if well and thoroughly done, leads to a high activity of the senses. The process is called in Yogic discipline, *n"ad\$û-«suddhi* or nerve-purification.

The obstruction in the channel may be such as not absolutely to stop in however small a degree, but to distort the information. A familiar instance of this is the effect of fear or alarm on the sense action. The startled horse takes the sack on the road for a dangerous living thing, the startled man takes a rope for a snake, a waving curtain for a ghostly form. All distortions due to actions in the nervous system can be traced to some kind of emotional disturbance acting in the nerve channels. The only remedy for them is the habit of calm, the habitual steadiness of the nerves. This also can be brought about by *n"ad\$û-«suddhi* or nerve-purification, which quiets the system, gives a deliberate calmness to all the internal processes and prepares the purification of the mind.

If the nerve channels are quiet and clear, the only possible disturbance of the information is from or through the mind. Now the *manas* or sixth sense is in itself a channel like the nerves, a channel for communication with the *buddhi* or brain-force. Disturbance may happen either from above or from



below. The information outside is first photographed on the end organ, then reproduced at the other end of the nerve system in the *citta* or passive memory. All the images of sight, sound, smell, touch and taste are deposited there and the *manas* reports them to the *buddhi*. The *manas* is both a sense organ and a channel. As a sense organ it is as automatically perfect as the others, as a channel it is subject to disturbance resulting either in obstruction or distortion.

As a sense organ the mind receives direct thought impressions from outside and from within. These impressions are in themselves perfectly correct, but in their report to the intellect they may either not reach the intellect at all or may reach it so distorted as to make a false or partially false impression. The disturbance may affect the impression which attends the information of eye, ear, nose, skin or palate, but it is very slightly powerful here. In its effect on the direct impressions of the mind, it is extremely powerful and the chief source of error. The mind takes direct impressions primarily of thought, but also of form, sound, indeed of all the things for which it usually prefers to depend on the sense organs. The full development of this sensitiveness of the mind is called in our Yogic discipline '*s"uk[smad]r]s]ti*' or subtle reception of images. Telepathy, clairvoyance, clairaudience, presentiment, thought-reading, character-reading and many other modern discoveries are very ancient powers of the mind which have been left undeveloped, and they all belong to the *manas*. The development of the sixth sense has never formed part of human training. In a future age it will undoubtedly take a place in the necessary preliminary training of the human instrument. Meanwhile there is no reason why the mind should not be trained to give a correct report to the intellect so that our thought may start with absolutely correct if not with full impressions.

The first obstacle, the nervous emotional, we may suppose to be removed by the purification of the nervous system. The second obstacle is that of the emotions themselves warping the impression as it comes. Love may do this, hatred may do this, any emotion or desire according to its power and intensity may distort the impression as it travels. This difficulty can only be removed by the discipline of the emotions, the purifying of the moral habits. This is a part of moral training and its consideration may be postponed for the moment. The next difficulty is the interference of previous associations formed or ingrained in the *citta* or passive memory. We have a habitual way of looking at things and the conservative inertia in our nature disposes us to give every new experience the shape and semblance of those to which we are accustomed. It is only more developed minds which can receive first impressions without an unconscious bias against the novelty experience. For instance, if we get a true impression of what is happening—and we habitually act on such impressions true or false—if it differs from what we are accustomed to expect, the old association meets it in the *citta* and sends a changed report to the intellect in which either the new impression is overlaid and concealed by the old or mingled with it. To go farther into this subject would be to involve ourselves too deeply into the details of psychology. This typical instance will suffice. To get rid of this obstacle is impossible without *citta«suddhi* or purification of the mental and moral habits formed in the *citta*. This is a preliminary process of Yoga and was effected in our ancient system by various means, but would be considered out of place in a modern system of education.

It is clear, therefore, that unless we revert to our old Indian system in some of its principles, we must be content to allow this source of disturbance to remain. A really national system of education would not allow itself to be controlled by European ideas in this all-important matter. And there is a process so simple and momentous that it can easily be made a part of our system.

It consists in bringing about passivity of the restless flood of thought sensations rising of its own momentum from the passive memory independent of our will and control. This passivity liberates the intellect from the siege of old associations and false impressions. It gives it power to select only what is wanted from the storehouse of the passive memory, automatically brings about the habit of getting right impressions and enables the intellect to dictate to the *citta* what *sa=msk"aras* or associations shall be formed or rejected. This is the real office of the intellect,—to discriminate,

choose, select, arrange. But so long as there is no *citta*«*suddhi*, instead of doing this office perfectly, it itself remains imperfect and corrupt and adds to the confusion in the mind channel by false judgment, false imagination, false memory, false observation, false comparison, contrast and analogy, false deduction, induction and inference. The purification of the *citta* is essential for the liberation, purification and perfect action of the intellect.

# Sense-Improvement by Practice

Another cause of the inefficiency of the senses as gatherers of knowledge, is insufficient use. We do not observe sufficiently or with sufficient attention and closeness and a sight, sound, smell, even touch or taste knocks in vain at the door for admission. This 'tamasic' inertia of the receiving instruments is no doubt due to the inattention of the *buddhi*, and therefore its consideration may seem to come properly under the training of the functions of the intellect, but it is more convenient, though less psychologically correct, to notice it here. The student ought to be accustomed to catch the sights, sounds, etc., around him, distinguish them, mark their nature, properties and sources and fix them in the *citta* so that they may be always ready to respond when called for by the memory.

It is a fact which has been proved by minute experiments that the faculty of observation is very imperfectly developed in men, merely from want of care in the use of the sense and the memory. Give twelve men the task of recording from memory something they all saw two hours ago and the accounts will all vary from each other and from the actual occurrence. To get rid of this imperfection will go a long way towards the removal of error. It can be done by training the senses to do their work perfectly, which they will do readily enough if they know the *buddhi* requires it of them, and giving sufficient attention to put the facts in their right place and order in the memory.

Attention is a factor in knowledge, the importance of which has been always recognised. Attention is the first condition of right memory and of accuracy. To attend to what he is doing is the first element of discipline required of the student, and, as I have suggested, this can easily be secured if the object of attention is made interesting. This attention to a single thing is called concentration. One truth is, however, sometimes overlooked; that concentration on several things at a time is often indispensable. When people talk of concentration, they imply centring the mind on one thing at a time; but it is quite possible to develop the power of double concentration, triple concentration, multiple concentration. When a given incident is happening, it may be made up of several simultaneous happenings or a set of simultaneous circumstances, a sight, a sound, a touch or several sights, sounds, touches occurring at the same moment or in the same short space of time. The tendency of the mind is to fasten on one and mark others vaguely, may not at all or, if compelled to attend to all, to be distracted and mark none perfectly. Yet this can be remedied and the attention equally distributed over a set of circumstances in such a way as to observe and remember each perfectly. It is merely a matter of *abhyasa* or steady natural practice.

It is also very desirable that the hand should be capable of coming to the help of the eye in dealing with the multitudinous objects of its activity so as to ensure accuracy. This is of a use so obvious and imperatively needed, that it need not be dwelt on at length. The practice of imitation by the hand of the thing seen is of use both in detecting the lapses and inaccuracies of the mind, in noticing the objects of sense and in registering accurately what has been seen. Imitation by the hand ensures accuracy of observation. This is one of the first uses of drawing and it is sufficient in itself to make the teaching of this subject a necessary part of the training of the organs.

# The Training of the Mental Faculties

The first qualities of the mind that have to be developed are those which can be grouped under observation. We notice some things, ignore others. Even of what we notice, we observe very little. A general perception of an object is what we all usually carry away from a cursory half-attentive glance. A closer attention fixes its place, form, nature as distinct from its surroundings. Full concentration of the faculty of observation gives us all the knowledge that the three chief senses can gather about the object, or if we touch or taste, we may gather all that the five senses can tell of its nature and properties. Those who make use of the sixth sense, the poet, the painter, the Yogin, can also gather much that is hidden from the ordinary observer. The scientist by investigation ascertains other facts open to a minuter observation. These are the components of the faculty of observation and it is obvious that its basis is attention, which may be only close or close and minute. We may gather much even from a passing glance at an object, if we have the habit of concentrating the attention and the habit of *sattwic* receptivity. The first thing the teacher has to do is to accustom the pupil to concentrate attention.

We may take the instance of a flower. Instead of looking casually at it and getting a casual impression of scent, form and colour, he should be encouraged to know the flower – to fix in his mind the exact shade, the peculiar glow, the precise intensity of the scent, the beauty of curve and design in the form. His touch should assure itself of the texture and its peculiarities. Next, the flower should be taken to pieces and its structure examined with the same carefulness of observation. All this should be done not as a task, but as an object of interest by skilfully arranged questions suited to the learner which will draw him on to observe and investigate one thing after the other until he has almost unconsciously mastered the whole.

Memory and judgement are the next qualities that will be called upon, and they should be encouraged in the same unconscious way. The student should not be made to repeat the same lesson over again in order to remember it. That is a mechanical, burdensome and unintelligent way of training the memory. A similar but different flower should be put in the hands and he should be encouraged to note it with the same care, but with the avowed object of noting the similarities and differences. By this practice daily repeated the memory will naturally be trained. Not only so, but the mental centres of comparison and contrast will be developed. The learner will begin to observe as a habit the similarities of things and their differences. The teacher should take every care to encourage the perfect growth of this faculty and habit. At the same time, the laws of species and genus will begin to dawn on the mind and, by a skilful following and leading of the young developing mind, the scientific habit, the scientific attitude and the fundamental facts of scientific knowledge may in a very short time be made part of its permanent equipment. The observation and comparison of flowers, leaves, plants, trees will lay the foundations of botanical knowledge without loading the mind with names and that dry set acquisition of informations which is the beginning of cramming and detested by the healthy human mind when it is fresh from nature and unspoiled by unnatural habits. In the same way by the observation of the stars, astronomy, by the observation of earth, stones, etc., geology, by the observation of insects and animals, entomology and zoology may be founded. A little later chemistry may be started by interesting observation of experiments without any formal teaching or heaping on the mind of formulas and book knowledge. There is no

scientific subject the perfect and natural mastery of which cannot be prepared in early childhood by this training of the faculties to observe, compare, remember and judge various classes of objects. It can be done easily and attended with a supreme and absorbing interest in the mind of the student. Once the taste is created, the boy can be trusted to follow it up with all the enthusiasm of youth in his leisure hours. This will prevent the necessity at a later age of teaching him everything in class.

The judgement will naturally be trained along with the other faculties. At every step the boy will have to decide what is the right idea, measurement, appreciation of colour, sound, scent, etc., and what is the wrong. Often the judgements and distinctions made will have to be exceedingly subtle and delicate. At first many errors will be made, but the learner should be taught to trust his judgment without being attached to its results. It will be found that the judgement will soon begin to respond to the calls made on it, clear itself of all errors and begin to judge correctly and minutely. The best way is to accustom the boy to compare his judgements with those of others. When he is wrong, it should at first be pointed out to him how far he was right and why he went wrong; afterwards he should be encouraged to note these things for himself. Every time he is right, his attention should be prominently and encouragingly called to it so that he may get confidence.

While engaged in comparing and contrasting, another centre is certain to develop, the centre of analogy. The learner will inevitably draw analogies and argue from like to like. He should be encouraged to use this faculty while noticing its limitations and errors. In this way he will be trained to form the habit of correct analogy which is an indispensable aid in the acquisition of knowledge.

The one faculty we have omitted, apart from the faculty of direct reasoning, is Imagination. This is a most important and indispensable instrument. It may be divided into three functions, the forming of mental images, the power of creating thoughts, images and imitations or new combinations of existing thoughts and images, the appreciation of the soul in things, beauty, charm, greatness, hidden suggestiveness, the emotion and spiritual life that pervades the world. This is in every way as important as the training of the faculties which observe and compare outward things. But that demands a separate and fuller treatment.

The mental faculties should first be exercised on things, afterwards on words and ideas. Our dealings with language are much too perfunctory and the absence of a fine sense for words impoverishes the intellect and limits the fineness and truth of its operation. The mind should be accustomed first to notice the word thoroughly, its form, sound and sense; then to compare the form with other similar forms in the points of similarity and difference, thus forming the foundation of the grammatical sense; then to distinguish between the fine shades of sense of similar words and the formation and rhythm of different sentences, thus forming the formation of the literary and the syntactical faculties. All this should be done informally, drawing on the curiosity and interest, avoiding set teaching and memorising of rules. The true knowledge takes its base on things, *arthas*, and only when it has mastered the thing, proceeds to formalise its information.

# The Training of the Logical Faculty

The training of the logical reason must necessarily follow the training of the faculties which collect the material on which the logical reason must work. Not only so but the mind must have some development of the faculty of dealing with words before it can deal successfully with ideas. The question is, once this preliminary work is done, what is the best way of teaching the boy to think correctly from premises. For the logical reason cannot proceed without premises. It either infers from facts to a conclusion, or from previously formed conclusions to a fresh one, or from one fact to another. It either induces, deduces or simply infers. I see the sunrise day after day, I conclude or induce that it rises as a law daily after a varying interval of darkness. I have already ascertained that wherever there is smoke, there is fire. I have induced that general rule from an observation of facts. I deduce that in a particular case of smoke there is a fire behind. I infer that a man must have lit it from the improbability of any other cause under the particular circumstances. I cannot deduce it because fire is not always created by human kindling; it may be volcanic or caused by a stroke of lightning or the sparks from some kind of friction in the neighbourhood.

There are three elements necessary to correct reasoning : first, the correctness of the facts or conclusions I start from, secondly, the completeness as well as the accuracy of the data I start from, thirdly, the elimination of other possible or impossible conclusions from the same facts. The fallibility of the logical reason is due partly to avoidable negligence and looseness in securing these conditions, partly to the difficulty of getting all the facts complete, most of all, to the extreme difficulty of eliminating all possible conclusions except the one which happens to be right. No fact is supposed to be more perfectly established than the universality of the Law of Gravitation as an imperative rule, yet a single new fact inconsistent with it would upset this supposed universality. And such facts exist. Nevertheless by care and keenness the fallibility may be reduced to its minimum.

The usual practice is to train the logical reason by teaching the science of Logic. This is an instance of the prevalent error by which book knowledge of a thing is made the object of the study instead of the thing itself. The experience of reasoning and its errors should be given to the mind and it should be taught to observe how this works for itself; it should proceed from the example to the rule and from the accumulating harmony of rules to the formal science of the subject, not from the formal science to the rule, and from the rule to the example.

The first step is to make the young mind interest itself in drawing inferences from the facts, tracing cause and effect. It should then be led on to notice its successes and its failures and the reason of the success and of the failure; the incorrectness of the fact started from, the haste in drawing conclusions from insufficient facts, the carelessness in accepting a conclusion which is improbable, little supported by the data or open to doubt, the indolence or prejudice which does not wish to consider other possible explanations or conclusions. In this way the mind can be trained to reason as correctly as the fallibility of human logic will allow, minimising the chances of error. The study of formal logic should be postponed to a later time when it can easily be mastered in a very brief period, since it will be only the systematising of an art perfectly well-known to the student.

## B. The Mother's Writings

### INTEGRAL EDUCATION

Education

Physical Education

Vital Education

Mental Education

Psychic Education and Spiritual Education

# Education

The education of a human being should begin at birth and continue throughout his life.

Indeed, if we want this education to have its maximum result, it should begin even before birth; in this case it is the mother herself who proceeds with this education by means of a twofold action: first, upon herself for her own improvement, and secondly, upon the child whom she is forming physically. For it is certain that the nature of the child to be born depends very much upon the mother who forms it, upon her aspiration and will as well as upon the material surroundings in which she lives. To see that her thoughts are always beautiful and pure, her feelings always noble and fine, her material surroundings as harmonious as possible and full of a great simplicity – this is the part of education which should apply to the mother herself. And if she has in addition a conscious and definite will to form the child according to the highest ideal she can conceive, then the very best conditions will be realised so that the child can come into the world with his utmost potentialities. How many difficult efforts and useless complications would be avoided in this way?

Education to be complete must have five principal aspects corresponding to the five principal activities of the human being; the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual. Usually, these phases of education follow chronologically the growth of the individual; this, however, does not mean that one of them should replace another, but that all must continue, completing one another until the end of his life.

We propose to study these five aspects of education one by one and also their interrelationships. But before we enter into the details of the subject, I wish to make a recommendation to parents. Most parents, for various reasons, give very little thought to the true education which should be imparted to children. When they have brought a child into the world, provided him with food, satisfied his various material needs and looked after his health more or less carefully, they think they have fully discharged their duty. Later on, they will send him to school and hand over to the teachers the responsibility for his education.

There are other parents who know their children must be educated and who try to do what they can. But very few, even among those who are most serious and sincere, know that the first thing to do, in order to be able to educate a child, is to educate oneself, to become conscious and master of oneself so that one never sets a bad example to one's child. For it is above all through example that education becomes effective. To speak good words and to give wise advice to a child has very little effect if one does not oneself give him an example of what one teaches. Sincerity, honesty, straightforwardness, courage, disinterestedness, unselfishness, patience, endurance, perseverance, peace, calm, self-control are all things that are taught infinitely better by example than by beautiful speeches. Parents, have a high ideal and always act in accordance with it and you will see that little by little your child will reflect this ideal in himself and spontaneously manifest the qualities you would like to see expressed in his nature. Quite naturally a child has respect and admiration for his parents; unless they are quite unworthy, they will always appear to their child as demi-gods whom he will try to imitate as best he can.

With very few exceptions, parents are not aware of the disastrous influence that their own defects, impulses, weaknesses and lack of self-control have on their children. If you wish to be



respected by a child, have respect for yourself and be worthy of respect at every moment. Never be authoritarian, despotic, impatient or ill-tempered. When your child asks you a question, do not give him a stupid or silly answer under the pretext that he cannot understand you. You can always make yourself understood if you take enough trouble; and in spite of the popular saying that it is not always good to tell the truth, I affirm that it is always good to tell the truth, but that the art consists in telling it in such a way as to make it accessible to the mind of the hearer. In early life, until he is twelve or fourteen, the child's mind is hardly open to abstract notions and general ideas. And yet you can train it to understand these things by using concrete images, symbols or parables. Up to quite an advanced age and for some who mentally always remain children, a narrative, a story, a tale well told teaches much more than any number of theoretical explanations.

Another pitfall to avoid: do not scold your child without good reason and only when it is quite indispensable. A child who is too often scolded gets hardened to rebuke and no longer attaches much importance to words or severity of tone. And above all, take good care never to scold him for a fault which you yourself commit. Children are very keen and clear-sighted observers; they soon find out your weaknesses and note them without pity.

When a child has done something wrong, see that he confesses it to you spontaneously and frankly; and when he has confessed, with kindness and affection make him understand what was wrong in his movement so that he will not repeat it, but never scold him; a fault confessed must always be forgiven. You should not allow any fear to come between you and your child; fear is a pernicious means of education : it invariably gives birth to deceit and lying. Only a discerning affection that is firm yet gentle and an adequate practical knowledge will create the bonds of trust that are indispensable for you to be able to educate your child effectively. And do not forget that you have to control yourself constantly in order to be equal to your task and truly fulfil the duty which you owe your child by the mere fact of having brought him into the world.

– *Bulletin*, February 1951

# Physical Education

Of all the domains of human consciousness, the physical is the one most completely governed by method, order, discipline, process. The lack of plasticity and receptivity in matter has to be replaced by a detailed organisation that is both precise and comprehensive. In this organisation, one must not forget the interdependence and interpenetration of all the domains of the being. However, even a mental or vital impulse, to express itself physically, must submit to an exact process. That is why all education of the body, if it is to be effective, must be rigorous and detailed, far-sighted and methodical. This will be translated into habits; the body is a being of habits. But these habits should be controlled and disciplined, while remaining flexible enough to adapt themselves to circumstances and to the needs of the growth and development of the being.

All education of the body should begin at birth and continue throughout life. It is never too soon to begin nor too late to continue.

Physical education had three principal aspects: (1) control and discipline of the functioning of the body; (2) an integral, methodical and harmonious development of all the parts and movements of the body; and (3) correction of any defects and deformities.

It may be said that from the very first days, even the first hours of his life, the child should undergo the first part of this programme as far as food, sleep, evacuation, etc. are concerned. If the child, from the very beginning of his existence, learns good habits, it will save him a good deal of trouble and inconvenience for the rest of the life; and besides, those who have the responsibility of caring for him during his first years will find their task very much easier.

Naturally, this education, if it is to be rational, enlightened and effective, must be based upon a minimum knowledge of the human body, of its structure and its functioning. As the child develops, he must gradually be taught to observe the functioning of his internal organs so that he may control them more and more, and see that this functioning remains normal and harmonious. As for positions, postures and movements, bad habits are formed very early and very rapidly, and these may have disastrous consequences for his whole life. Those who take the question of physical education seriously and wish to give their children the best conditions for normal development will easily find the necessary indications and instructions. The subject is being more and more thoroughly studied, and many books have appeared and are still appearing which give all the information and guidance needed.

It is not possible for me here to go into the details of the application, for each problem is different from every other and the solution should suit the individual case. The question of food has been studied at length and in detail; the diet that helps children in their growth is generally known and it may be very useful to follow it. But it is very important to remember that the instinct of the body, so long as it remains intact, is more reliable than any theory. Accordingly, those who want their child to develop normally should not force him to eat food which he finds distasteful, for most often the body possesses a sure instinct as to what is harmful to it, unless the child is particularly capricious.

The body in its normal state, that is to say, when there is no intervention of mental notions or vital impulses, also knows very well what is good and necessary for it; but for this to be effective in practice, one must educate the child with care and teach him to distinguish his desires from his needs. He should be helped to develop a taste for food that is simple and healthy, substantial and

appetising, but free from any useless complications. In his daily food, all that merely stuffs and causes heaviness should be avoided; and above all, he must be taught to eat according to his hunger, neither more nor less, and not to make his meals an occasion to satisfy his greed or gluttony. From one's very childhood, one should know that one eats in order to give strength and health to the body and not to enjoy the pleasures of the palate. Children should be given food that suits their temperament, prepared in a way that ensures hygiene and cleanliness, that is pleasant to the taste and yet very simple. This food should be chosen and apportioned according to the age of the child and his regular activities. It should contain all the chemical and dynamic elements that are necessary for his development and the balanced growth of every part of his body.

Since the child will be given only the food that helps to keep him healthy and provide him with the energy he needs, one must be very careful not to use food as a means of coercion and punishment. The practice of telling a child, "You have not been a good boy, you won't get any dessert", etc., is most harmful. In this way you create in his little consciousness the impression that food is given to him chiefly to satisfy his greed and not because it is indispensable for the proper functioning of his body.

Another thing should be taught to a child from his early years: to enjoy cleanliness and observe hygienic habits. But, in obtaining this cleanliness and respect for the rules of hygiene from the child, one must take great care not to instill into him the fear of illness. Fear is the worst instrument of education and the surest way of attracting what is feared. Yet, while there should be no fear of illness, there should be no inclination for it either. There is a prevalent belief that brilliant minds are found in weak bodies. This is a delusion and has no basis. There was perhaps a time when a romantic and morbid taste for physical unbalance prevailed; but, fortunately, that tendency has disappeared. Nowadays a well-built, robust, muscular, strong and well-balanced body is appreciated at its true value. In any case, children should be taught to respect health and admire the healthy man whose vigorous body knows how to repel attacks of illness. Often a child feigns illness to avoid some troublesome obligation, a work that does not interest him, or simply to soften his parent's hearts and get them to satisfy some caprice. The child must be taught as early as possible that this does not work and that he does not become more interesting by being ill, but rather the contrary. The weak have a tendency to believe that their weakness makes them particularly interesting and to use this weakness and if necessary even illness as a means of attracting the attention and sympathy of the people around them. On no account should this pernicious tendency be encouraged. Children should therefore be taught that to be ill is a sign of weakness and inferiority, not of some virtue or sacrifice.

That is why, as soon as the child is able to make use of his limbs, some time should be devoted every day to the methodical and regular development of all the parts of his body. Every day some twenty or thirty minutes, preferably on waking, if possible, will be enough to ensure the proper functioning and balanced growth of his muscles while preventing any stiffening of the joints and of the spine, which occurs much sooner than one thinks. In the general programme of the child's education, sports and outdoor games should be given a prominent place; that, more than all the medicines in the world, will assure the child good health. An hour's moving about in the sun does more to cure weakness or even anaemia than a whole arsenal of tonics. My advice is that medicines should not be used unless it is absolutely impossible to avoid them; and this "absolutely impossible" should be very strict. In this programme of physical culture, although there are well-known general lines to be followed for the best development of the human body, still, if the method is to be fully effective in each case, it should be considered individually, if possible with the help of a competent person, or if not, by consulting the numerous manuals that have already been and are still being published on the subject.

But in any case a child, whatever his activities, should have a sufficient number of hours of sleep. The number will vary according to his age. In the cradle, the baby should sleep longer than he

remains awake. The number of hours of sleep will diminish as the child grows. But until maturity it should not be less than eight hours, in a quiet, well-ventilated place. The child should never be made to stay up late for no reason. The hours before midnight are the best for resting the nerves. Even during the waking hours, relaxation is indispensable for all who want to maintain their nervous balance. To know how to relax the muscles and the nerves is an art which should be taught to children when they are very young. There are many parents who, on the contrary, push their child to constant activity. When the child remains quiet, they imagine that he is ill. There are even parents who have the bad habit of making their child do household work at the expense of his rest and relaxation. Nothing is worse for a developing nervous system, which cannot stand the strain of too continuous an effort or of an activity that is imposed upon it and not freely chosen. At the risk of going against many current ideas and ruffling many prejudices, I hold that it is not fair to demand service from a child, as if it were his duty to serve his parents. The contrary would be more true, and certainly it is natural that parents should serve their child or at least take great care of him. It is only if a child chooses freely to work for his family and does this work as play that the thing is admissible. And even then, one must be careful that it in no way diminishes the hours of rest that are absolutely indispensable for his body to function properly.

I have said that from a young age children should be taught to respect good health, physical strength and balance. The great importance of beauty must also be emphasised. A young child should aspire for beauty, not for the sake of pleasing others or winning their admiration, but for the love of beauty itself; for beauty is the ideal which all physical life must realise. Every human being has the possibility of establishing harmony among the different parts of his body and in the various movements of the body in action. Every human body that undergoes a rational method of culture from the beginning of its existence can realise its own harmony and thus become fit to manifest beauty. When we speak of the other aspect of an integral education, we shall see what inner conditions are to be fulfilled so that this beauty can one day be manifested.

So far I have referred only to the education to be given to children; for a good many bodily defects can be rectified and many malformations avoided by an enlightened physical education given at the proper time. But if for any reason this physical education has not been given during childhood or even in youth, it can begin at any age and be pursued throughout life. But the later one begins, the more one must be prepared to meet bad habits that have to be corrected, rigidities to be made supple, malformations to be rectified. And this preparatory work will require much patience and perseverance before one can start on a constructive programme for the harmonisation of the form and its movements. But if you keep alive within you the ideal of beauty that is to be realised, sooner or later you are sure to reach the goal you have set yourself.

— *Bulletin*, April 1951

# Vital Education

Of all education, vital education is perhaps the most important, the most indispensable. Yet it is rarely taken up and pursued with discernment and method. There are several reasons for this: first, the human mind is in a state of great confusion about this particular subject; secondly, the undertaking is very difficult and to be successful in it one must have endless endurance and persistence and a will that no failure can weaken.

Indeed, the vital in man's nature is a despotic and exacting tyrant. Moreover, since it is the vital which holds power, energy, enthusiasm, effective dynamism, many have a feeling of timorous respect for it and always try to please it. But it is a matter that nothing can satisfy and its demands are without limit. Two ideas which are very widespread, especially in the West, contribute towards making its domination more sovereign. One is that the chief aim of life is to be happy; the other that one is born with a certain character and that it is impossible to change it.

The first idea is a childish deformation of a very profound truth: that all existence is based upon delight of being and without delight of being there would be no life. But this delight of being, which is a quality of the Divine and therefore unconditioned, must not be confused with the pursuit of pleasure in life, which depends largely upon circumstances. The conviction that he has the right to be happy leads, as a matter of course, to the will to "live one's own life" at any cost. This attitude, by its obscure and aggressive egoism, leads to every kind of conflict and misery, disappointment and discouragement, and very often ends in catastrophe.

In the world as it is now the goal of life is not to secure personal happiness, but to awaken the individual progressively to the Truth-consciousness.

The second idea arises from the fact that a fundamental change of character demands an almost complete mastery over the subconscious and a very rigorous disciplining of whatever comes upon from the inconscient, which, in ordinary natures, expresses itself as the effects of atavism and of the environment in which one was born. Only an almost abnormal growth of consciousness and the constant help of Grace can achieve this Herculean task. That is why this task has rarely been attempted and many famous teachers have declared it to be unrealisable and chimerical. Yet it is not unrealisable. The transformation of character has in fact been realised by means of a clear-sighted discipline and a perseverance so obstinate that nothing, not even the most persistent failures, can discourage it.

The indispensable starting-point is a detailed and discerning observation of the character to be transformed. In most cases, that itself is a difficult and often a very baffling task. But there is one fact which the old traditions knew and which can serve as the clue in the labyrinth of inner discovery. It is that everyone possesses in a large measure, and the exceptional individual in an increasing degree of precision, two opposite tendencies of character, in almost equal proportions, which are like the light and the shadow of the same thing. Thus someone who has the capacity of being exceptionally generous will suddenly find an obstinate avarice rising up in his nature, the courageous man will be a coward in some part of his being and the good man will suddenly have wicked impulses. In this way life seems to endow everyone not only with the possibility of expressing an ideal, but also with contrary elements representing in a concrete manner the battle he has to wage and the victory he has

to win for the realisation to become possible. Consequently, all life is an education pursued more or less consciously, more or less willingly. In certain cases this education will encourage the movements that express the light, in others, on the contrary, those that express the shadow. If the circumstances and the environment are favourable, the light will grow at the expense of the shadow; otherwise the opposite will happen. And in this way the individual's character will crystallise according to the whims of Nature and the determinisms of material and vital life, unless a higher element comes in in time, a conscious will which, refusing to allow Nature to follow her whimsical ways, will replace them by a logical and clear-sighted discipline. This conscious will is what we mean by a rational method of education.

That is why it is of prime importance that the vital education of the child should begin as early as possible, indeed, as soon as he is able to use his senses. In this way many bad habits will be avoided and many harmful influences eliminated.

This vital education has two principal aspects, very different in their aims and methods, but both equally important. The first concerns the development and use of the sense organs. The second progressing awareness and control of the character, culminating in its transformation.

The education of the senses, again, has several aspects, which are added to one another as the being grows; indeed it should never cease. The sense organs, if properly cultivated, can attain a precision and power of functioning far exceeding what is normally expected of them.

In some ancient initiations it was stated that the number of senses that man can develop is not five but seven and in certain special cases even twelve. Certain races at certain times have, out of necessity, developed more or less perfectly one or the other of these supplementary senses. With a proper discipline persistently followed, they are within the reach of all who are sincerely interested in this development and its results. Among the faculties that are often mentioned, there is, for example, the ability to widen the physical consciousness, project it out of oneself so as to concentrate it on a given point and thus obtain sight, hearing, smell, taste and even touch at a distance.

To this general education of the senses and their functioning there will be added, as early as possible, the cultivation of discrimination and of the aesthetic sense, the capacity to choose and adopt what is beautiful and harmonious, simple, healthy and pure. For there is a psychological health just as there is a physical health, a beauty and harmony of the sensations as of the body and its movements. As the capacity of understanding grows in the child, he should be taught, in the course of his education, to add artistic taste and refinement to power and precision. He should be shown, led to appreciate, taught to love beautiful, lofty, healthy and noble things, whether in Nature or in human creation. This should be a true aesthetic culture, which will protect him from degrading influences. For, in the wake of the last wars and the terrible nervous tension which they provoked, as a sign, perhaps, of the decline of civilisation and social decay, a growing vulgarity seems to have taken possession of human life, individual as well as collective, particularly in what concerns aesthetic life and the life of the senses. A methodical and enlightened cultivation of the senses can, little by little, eliminate from the child whatever is by contagion vulgar, commonplace and crude. This education will have very happy effects even on his character. For one who has developed a truly refined taste will, because of this very refinement, feel incapable of acting in a crude, brutal or vulgar manner. This refinement, if it is sincere, brings to the being a nobility and generosity which will spontaneously find expression in his behaviour and will protect him from many base and perverse movements.

And this brings us quite naturally to the second aspect of vital education which concerns the character and its transformation.

Generally, all disciplines dealing with the vital being, its purification and its control, proceed by coercion, suppression, abstinence and asceticism. This procedure is certainly easier and quicker, although less deeply enduring and effective, than a rigorous and detailed education. Besides, it

eliminates all possibility of the intervention, help and collaboration of the vital. And yet this help is of the utmost importance if one wants the individual's growth and action to be complete.

To become conscious of the various movements in oneself and be aware of what one does and why one does it, is the indispensable starting-point. The child must be taught to observe, to note his reactions and impulses and their causes, to become a discerning witness of his desires, his movements of violence and passion, his instincts of possession and appropriation and domination and the background of vanity which supports them, together with their counterparts of weakness, discouragement, depression and despair.

Evidently, for this process to be useful, along with the growth of the power of observation the will for progress and perfection must also grow. This will should be instilled into the child as soon as he is capable of having a will, that is to say, at a much earlier age than is usually believed.

In order to awaken this will to surmount and conquer, different methods are appropriate in different cases; with certain individuals rational arguments are effective, for others their feelings and goodwill should be brought into play, with yet others the sense of dignity and self-respect. For all, the most powerful method is example constantly and sincerely shown.

Once the resolution has been firmly established, one has only to proceed rigorously and persistently and never to accept any defeat as final. To avoid all weakening and backsliding, there is one important point you must know and never forget: the will can be cultivated and developed just as the muscles can by methodical and progressive exercise. You must not shrink from demanding the maximum effort of your will even for a thing that seems of no importance, for it is through effort that its capacity grows, gradually acquiring the power to apply itself even to the most difficult things. What you have decided to do, you must do, whatever the cost, even if you have to renew your effort over and over again any number of times in order to do it. Your will will be strengthened by the effort and you will have only to choose with discernment the goal to which you will apply it.

To sum up: one must gain full knowledge of one's character and then acquire control over one's movements in order to achieve perfect mastery and the transformation of all the elements that have to be transformed.

Now all will depend upon the ideal which the effort for mastery and transformation seeks to achieve. The value of the effort and its result will depend upon the value of the ideal. This is the subject we shall deal with next, in connection with mental education.

– *Bulletin*, August 1951

# Mental Education

Of all lines of education, mental education is the most widely known and practised, yet except in a few rare cases there are gaps which make it something very incomplete and in the end quite insufficient.

Generally speaking, schooling is considered to be all the mental education that is necessary. And when a child has been made to undergo, for a number of years, a methodical training which is more like cramming than true schooling, it is considered that whatever is necessary for his mental development has been done. Nothing of the kind. Even conceding that the training is given with due measure and discrimination and does not permanently damage the brain, it cannot impart to the human mind the faculties it needs to become a good and useful instrument. The schooling that is usually given can, at the most, serve as a system of gymnastics to increase the suppleness of the brain. From this standpoint, each branch of human learning represents a special kind of mental gymnastics, and the verbal formulations given to these various branches each constitute a special and well-defined language.

A true mental education, which will prepare man for a higher life, has five principal phases. Normally these phases follow one after another, but in exceptional individuals they may alternate or even proceed simultaneously. These five phases, in brief, are:

- (1) Development of the power of concentration, the capacity of attention.
- (2) Development of the capacities of expansion, widening, complexity and richness.
- (3) Organisation of one's ideas around a central idea, a higher ideal or a supremely luminous idea that will serve as a guide in life.
- (4) Thought-control, rejection of undesirable thoughts, to become able to think only what one wants and when one wants.
- (5) Development of mental silence, perfect calm and a more and more total receptivity to inspirations coming from the higher regions of the being.

It is not possible to give here all the details concerning the methods to be employed in the application of these five phases of education to different individuals. Still, a few explanations on points of detail can be given.

Undeniably, what most impedes mental progress in children is the constant dispersion of their thoughts. Their thoughts flutter hither and thither like butterflies and they have to make a great effort to fix them. Yet this capacity is latent in them, for when you succeed in arousing their interest, they are capable of a good deal of attention. By his ingenuity, therefore, the educator will gradually help the child to become capable of a sustained effort of attention and a faculty of more and more complete absorption in the work in hand. All methods that can develop this faculty of attention from games to rewards are good and can all be utilised according to the need and the circumstances. But it is the psychological action that is most important and the sovereign method is to arouse in the child an interest in what you want to teach him, a liking for work, a will to progress. To love to learn is the most precious gift that one can give to a child: to love to learn always and everywhere, so that all circumstances, all happenings in life may be constantly renewed opportunities for learning more and always more.



For that, to attention and concentration should be added observation, precise recording and faithfulness of memory. This faculty of observation can be developed by varied and spontaneous exercises, making use of every opportunity that presents itself to keep the child's thought wakeful, alert and prompt. The growth of the understanding should be stressed much more than that of memory. One knows well only what one has understood. Things learnt by heart, mechanically, fade away little by little and finally disappear; what is understood is never forgotten. Moreover, you must never refuse to explain to a child the how and the why of things. If you cannot do it yourself, you must direct the child to those who are qualified to answer or point out to him some books that deal with the question. In this way you will progressively awaken in the child the taste for true study and the habit of making a persistent effort to know.

This will bring us quite naturally to the second phase of development in which the mind should be widened and enriched.

You will gradually show the child that everything can become an interesting subject for study if it is approached in the right way. The life of every day, of every moment, is the best school of all, varied, complex, full of unexpected experiences, problems to be solved, clear and striking examples and obvious consequences. It is so easy to arouse healthy curiosity in children, if you answer with intelligence and clarity the numerous questions they ask. An interesting reply to one readily brings others in its train and so the attentive child learns without effort much more than he usually does in the classroom. By a choice made with care and insight, you should also teach him to enjoy good reading-matter which is both instructive and attractive. Do not be afraid of anything that awakens and pleases his imagination; imagination develops the creative mental faculty and through it study becomes living and the mind develops in joy.

In order to increase the suppleness and comprehensiveness of his mind, one should see not only that he studies many varied topics, but above all that a single subject is approached in various ways, so that the child understands in a practical manner that there are many ways of facing the same intellectual problem, of considering it and solving it. This will remove all rigidity from his brain and at the same time it will make his thinking richer and more supple and prepare it for a more complex and comprehensive synthesis. In this way also the child will be imbued with the sense of the extreme relativity of mental learning and, little by little, an aspiration for a truer source of knowledge will awaken in him.

Indeed, as the child grows older and progresses in his studies, his mind too ripens and becomes more and more capable of forming general ideas, and with them almost always comes a need for certitude, for a knowledge that is stable enough to form the basis of a mental construction which will permit all the diverse and scattered and often contradictory ideas accumulated in his brain to be organised and put in order. This ordering is indeed very necessary if one is to avoid chaos in one's thoughts. All contradictions can be transformed into complements, but for that one must discover the higher idea that will have the power to bring them harmoniously together. It is always good to consider every problem from all possible standpoints so as to avoid partiality and exclusiveness; but if the thought is to be active and creative, it must, in every case, be the natural and logical synthesis of all the points of view adopted. And if you want to make the totality of your thoughts into a dynamic and constructive force, you must also take great care as to the choice of the central idea of your mental synthesis; for upon that will depend the value of this synthesis. The higher and larger the central idea and the more universal it is, rising above time and space, the more numerous and the more complex will be the ideas, notions and thoughts which it will be able to organise and harmonise.

It goes without saying that this work of organisation cannot be done once and for all. The mind, if it is to keep its vigour and youth, must progress constantly, revise its notions in the light of new knowledge, enlarge its framework to include fresh notions and constantly reclassify and reorganise

its thoughts, so that each of them may find its true place in relation to the others and the whole remains harmonious and orderly.

All that has just been said concerns the speculative mind, the mind that learns. But learning is only one aspect of mental activity; the other, which is at least equally important, is the constructive faculty, the capacity to form and thus prepare action. This very important part of mental activity has rarely been subject of any special study or discipline. Only those who want, for some reason, to exercise a strict control over their mental activities think of observing and disciplining this faculty of formation; and as soon as they try it, they have to face difficulties so great that they appear almost insurmountable.

And yet control over this formative activity of the mind is one of the most important aspects of self-education; one can say that without it no mental mastery is possible. As far as study is concerned, all ideas are acceptable and should be included in the synthesis, whose very function is to become more and more rich and complex; but where action is concerned, it is just the opposite. The ideas that are accepted for translation into action should be strictly controlled and only those that agree with the general trend of the central idea forming the basis of the mental synthesis should be permitted to express themselves in action. This means that every thought entering the mental consciousness should be set before the central idea; if it finds a logical place among the thoughts already grouped, it will be admitted into the synthesis; if not, it will be rejected so that it can have no influence on the action. This work of mental purification should be done very regularly in order to secure a complete control over one's actions.

For this purpose, it is good to set apart time every day when one can quietly go over one's thoughts and put one's synthesis in order. Once the habit is acquired, you can maintain control over your thoughts even during work and action, allowing only those which are useful for what you are doing to come to the surface. Particularly, if you have continued to cultivate the power of concentration and attention, only the thoughts that are needed will be allowed to enter the active external consciousness and they then become all the more dynamic and effective. And if, in the intensity of concentration, it becomes necessary not to think at all, all mental vibration can be stilled and an almost total silence secured. In this silence one can gradually open to the higher regions of the mind and learn to record the inspirations that come from there.

But even before reaching this point, silence in itself is supremely useful, because in most people who have a somewhat developed and active mind, the mind is never at rest. During the day, its activity is kept under a certain control, but at night, during the sleep of the body, the control of the waking state is almost completely removed and the mind indulges in activities which are sometimes excessive and often incoherent. This creates a great stress which leads to fatigue and the diminution of the intellectual faculties.

The fact is that like all the other parts of the human being, the mind too needs rest and it will not have this rest unless we know how to provide it. The art of resting one's mind is something to be acquired. Changing one's mental activity is certainly the way of resting; but the greatest possible rest is silence. And as far as the mental faculties are concerned a few minutes passed in the calm of silence are a more effective rest than hours of sleep.

When one has learned to silence the mind at will and to concentrate it in receptive silence, then there will be no problem that cannot be solved, no mental difficulty whose solution cannot be found. When it is agitated, thought becomes confused and impotent; in an attentive tranquillity, the light can manifest itself and open up new horizons to man's capacity.

— *Bulletin*, November 1951

# Psychic Education and Spiritual Education

So far we have dealt only with the education that can be given to all children born upon earth and which is concerned with purely human faculties. But one need not inevitably stop there. Every human being carries hidden within him the possibility of a greater consciousness which goes beyond the bounds of his present life and enables him to share in a higher and a vaster life. Indeed, in all exceptional beings it is always this consciousness that governs their lives and organises both the circumstances of their existence and their individual reaction to these circumstances. What the human mental consciousness does not know and cannot do, this consciousness knows and does. It is like a light that shines at the centre of the being, radiating through the thick coverings of the external consciousness. Some have a vague intimation of its presence; a good many children are under its influence, which shows itself very distinctly at times in their spontaneous actions and even in their words. Unfortunately, since parents most often do not know what it is and do not understand what is happening in their child, their reaction to these phenomena is not a good one and all their education consists in making the child as unconscious as possible in this domain and concentrating all his attention on external things, thus accustoming him to think that they are the only ones that matter. It is true that this concentration on external things is very useful, provided that it is done in the proper way. The three lines of education—physical, vital and mental—deal with that and could be defined as the means of building up the personality, raising the individual out of the amorphous subconscious mass and making him a well-defined self-conscious entity. With psychic education we come to the problem of the true motive of existence, the purpose of life on earth, the discovery to which this life must lead and the result of that discovery: the consecration of the individual to his eternal principle. Normally this discovery is associated with a mystic feeling, a religious life, because it is mainly the religions that have concerned themselves with this aspect of life. But it need not necessarily be so: the mystic notion of God may be replaced by the more philosophical notion of truth and still the discovery will remain essentially the same, but the road leading to it may be taken even by the most intransigent positivist. For mental notions and ideas have only a very secondary importance in preparing one for the psychic life. The important thing is to live the experience; that carries with it its own reality and force apart from any theory that may precede or accompany or follow it, for most often theories are no more than explanations that one gives to oneself in order to have, more or less, the illusion of knowledge. Man clothes the ideal or the absolute he seeks to attain with different names according to the environment in which he is born and the education he has received. The experience is essentially the same, if it is sincere; it is only the words and phrases in which it is formulated that differ according to the belief and the mental education of the one who has the experience. All formulation is thus only an approximation that should be progressive and grow in precision as the experience itself becomes more and more precise and co-ordinated. Still, to sketch a general outline of psychic education, we must give some idea, however relative it may be, of what we mean by the psychic being. One could say, for example, that the creation of an individual being is the result of the projection, in time and space, of one of the countless possibilities latent in the supreme origin of all manifestation which, through the medium of the one and universal

consciousness, takes concrete form in the law or the truth of an individual and so, by a progressive development, becomes his soul or psychic being.

I must emphasise that what is stated briefly here does not claim to be a complete exposition of the reality and does not exhaust the subject – far from it. It is only a very summary explanation for a practical purpose, to serve as a basis for the education which we intend to consider now.

It is through this psychic presence that the truth of an individual being comes into contact with him and the circumstances of his life. In most cases the presence acts, so to say, far behind the veil, unrecognised and unknown; but in some, it is perceptible and its action recognisable and even, in a very few, the presence becomes tangible and its action fully effective. These go forward in life with an assurance and a certitude all their own; they are masters of their destiny. It is for the purpose of obtaining this mastery and becoming conscious of the psychic presence that psychic education should be practised. But for that there is need of a special factor, the personal will. For till now, the discovery of the psychic being and identification with it have not been among the recognised subjects of education, and although one can find in special treatises useful and practical hints on the subject, and although in exceptional cases one may have the good fortune of meeting someone who is capable of showing the way and giving the help that is needed to follow it, most often the attempt is left to one's own personal initiative. The discovery is a personal matter and a great determination, a strong will and an untiring perseverance are indispensable to reach the goal. Each one must, so to say, trace out his own path through his own difficulties. The goal is known to some extent, for most of those who have reached it have described it more or less clearly. But the supreme value of the discovery lies in its spontaneity, its ingenuousness, and that escapes all ordinary mental laws. And that is why anyone wanting to take up the adventure usually first seeks out some person who has successfully undertaken it and is able to sustain him and enlighten him on his way. Yet there are some solitary travellers and for them a few general indications may be useful.

The starting-point is to seek in yourself that which is independent of the body and the circumstances of life, which is not born of the mental formation that you have been given, the language you speak, the habits and customs of the environment in which you live, the country where you are born or the age to which you belong. You must find, in the depths of your being, that which carries in it a sense of universality, limitless expansion, unbroken continuity. Then you decentralise, extend and widen yourself; you begin to live in all things and in all beings; the barriers separating individuals from each other break down. You think in their thoughts, vibrate in their sensations, feel in their feelings, live in the life of all. What seemed inert suddenly becomes full of life, stones quicken, plants feel and will and suffer, animals speak in a language more or less inarticulate, but clear and expressive; everything is animated by a marvellous consciousness without time or limit. And this is only one aspect of the psychic realisation; there are others, many others. All help you to go beyond the barriers of your egoism, the walls of your external personality, the impotence of your reactions and the incapacity of your will.

But, as I have already said, the path to that realisation is long and difficult, strewn with snares and problems to be solved, which demand an unfailing determination. It is like the explorer's trek through virgin forest in quest of an unknown land, of some great discovery. The psychic being is also a great discovery which requires at least as much fortitude and endurance as the discovery of new continents. A few simple words of advice may be useful to one who has resolved to undertake it.

The first and perhaps the most important point is that the mind is incapable of judging spiritual things. All those who have written on this subject have said so; but very few are those who have put it into practice. And yet, in order to proceed on the path, it is absolutely indispensable to abstain from all mental opinion and reaction.

Give up all personal seeking for comfort, satisfaction, enjoyment or happiness. Be only a burning fire for progress, take whatever comes to you as an aid to your progress and immediately make whatever progress is required.

Try to take pleasure in all you do, but never do anything for the sake of pleasure.

Never get excited, nervous or agitated. Remain perfectly calm in the face of all circumstances. And yet be always alert to discover what progress you still have to make and lose no time in making it.

Never take physical happenings at their face value. They are always a clumsy attempt to express something else, the true thing which escapes our superficial understanding.

Never complain of the behaviour of anyone, unless you have the power to change in his nature what makes him act in this way; and if you have the power, change him instead of complaining.

Whatever you do, never forget the goal which you have set before you. There is nothing great or small once you have set out on this great discovery; all things are equally important and can either hasten or delay its success. Thus before you eat, concentrate a few seconds in the aspiration that the food you are about to eat may bring your body the substance it needs to serve as a solid basis for your effort towards the great discovery, and give it the energy for persistence and perseverance in the effort.

Before you go to sleep, concentrate a few seconds in the aspiration that the sleep may restore your fatigued nerves, bring calm and quietness to your brain so that on waking you may, with renewed vigour, begin again your journey on the path of the great discovery.

Before you act, concentrate in the will that your action may help or at least in no way hinder your march forward towards the great discovery.

When you speak, before the words come out of your mouth, concentrate just long enough to check your words and allow only those that are absolutely necessary to pass, only those that are not in any way harmful to your progress on the path of the great discovery.

To sum up, never forget the purpose and goal of your life. The will for the great discovery should be always there above you, above what you do and what you are, like a huge bird of light dominating all the movements of your being.

Before the untiring persistence of your effort, an inner door will suddenly open and you will emerge into a dazzling splendour that will bring you the certitude of immortality, the concrete experience that you have always lived and always shall live, that external forms alone perish and that these forms are, in relation to what you are in reality, like clothes that are thrown away when worn out. Then you will stand erect, freed from all chains, and instead of advancing laboriously under the weight of circumstances imposed upon you by Nature, which you had to endure and bear if you did not want to be crushed by them, you will be able to walk on, straight and firm, conscious of your destiny, master of your life.

And yet this release from all slavery to the flesh, this liberation from all personal attachment is not the supreme fulfilment. There are other steps to climb before you reach the summit. And even these steps can and should be followed by others which will open the doors to the future. These following steps will form the object of what I call spiritual education.

But before we enter on this new stage and deal with the question in detail, an explanation is necessary. Why is a distinction made between the psychic education of which we have just spoken and the spiritual education of which we are about to speak now ? Because the two are usually confused under the general term of "yogic discipline", although the goals they aim at are very different: for one it is a higher realisation upon earth, for the other an escape from all earthly manifestation, even from the whole universe, a return to the unmanifest.

So one can say that the psychic life is immortal life, endless time, limitless space, ever-progressive change, unbroken continuity in the universe of forms. The spiritual consciousness, on the other hand, means to live the infinite and the eternal, to be projected beyond all creation, beyond

time and space. To become conscious of your psychic being and to live a psychic life you must abolish all egoism; but to live a spiritual life you must no longer have an ego.

Here also, in spiritual education, the goal you set before you will assume, in the mind's formulation of it, different names according to the environment in which you have been brought up, the path you have followed and the affinities of your temperament. Those who have a religious tendency will call it God and their spiritual effort will be towards identification with the transcendent God beyond all forms, as opposed to the immanent God dwelling in each form. Others will call it the Absolute, the Supreme Origin, others Nirvana; yet others, who view the world as an unreal illusion, will name it the Only Reality and to those who regard all manifestation as falsehood it will be the Sole Truth. And every one of these expressions contains an element of truth, but all are incomplete, expressing only one aspect of that which is. Here too, however, the mental formulation has no great importance and once you have passed through the intermediate stages, the experience is identical. In any case, the most effective starting-point, the swiftest method is total self-giving. Besides, no joy is more perfect than the joy of a total self-giving to whatever is the summit of your conception: for some it is the notion of God, for others that of Perfection. If this self-giving is made with persistence and ardour, a moment comes when you pass beyond the concept and arrive at an experience that escapes all description, but which is almost always identical in its effects. And as your self-giving becomes more and more perfect and integral, it will be accompanied by the aspiration for identification, a total fusion with That to which you have given yourself, and little by little this aspiration will overcome all differences and all resistances, especially if with the aspiration there is an intense and spontaneous love, for then nothing can stand in the way of its victorious drive.

There is an essential difference between this identification and the identification with the psychic being. The latter can be made more and more lasting and, in certain cases, it becomes permanent and never leaves the person who has realised it, whatever his outer activities may be. In other words, the identification is no longer realised only in meditation and concentration, but its effects are felt at every moment of one's life, in sleep as well as in waking.

On the other hand, liberation from all form and the identification with that which is beyond form cannot last in an absolute manner; for it would automatically bring about the dissolution of the material form. Certain traditions say that this dissolution happens inevitably within twenty days of the total identification. Yet it is not necessarily so; and even if the experience is only momentary, it produces in the consciousness results that are never obliterated and have repercussions on all states of the being, both internal and external. Moreover, once the identification has been realised, it can be renewed at will, provided that you know how to put yourself in the same conditions.

This merging into the formless is the supreme liberation sought by those who want to escape from an existence which no longer holds any attraction for them. It is not surprising that they are dissatisfied with the world in its present form. But a liberation that leaves the world as it is and in no way affects the conditions of life from which others suffer, cannot satisfy those who refuse to enjoy a boon which they are the only ones, or almost the only ones, to possess, those who dream of a world more worthy of the splendours that lie hidden behind its apparent disorder and widespread misery. They dream of sharing with others the wonders they have discovered in their inner exploration. And the means to do so is within their reach, now that they have arrived at the summit of their ascent.

From beyond the frontiers of form a new force can be evoked, a power of consciousness which is as yet unexpressed and which, by its emergence, will be able to change the course of things and give birth to a new world. For the true solution to the problem of suffering, ignorance and death is not an individual escape from earthly miseries by self-annihilation into the unmanifest, nor a problematical collective flight from universal suffering by an integral and final return of the creation to its Creator, thus curing the universe not by abolishing it, but a transformation, a total transfiguration of matter

brought about by the logical continuation of Nature's ascending march in her progress towards perfection, by the creation of a new species that will be to man what man is to the animal and that will manifest upon earth a new force, a new consciousness and a new power. And so will begin a new education which can be called the supramental education; it will, by its all-powerful action, work not only upon the consciousness of individual beings, but upon the very substance of which they are built and upon the environment in which they live.

In contrast with the types of education we have mentioned previously, which progress from below upwards by an ascending movement of the various parts of the being, the supramental education will progress from above downwards, its influence spreading from one state of being to another until at last the physical is reached. This last transformation will only occur visibly when the inner states of being have already been considerably transformed. It is therefore quite unreasonable to try to recognise the presence of the supramental by physical appearances. For these will be the last to change and the supramental force can be at work in an individual long before anything of it becomes perceptible in his bodily life.

To sum up, one can say that the supramental education will result no longer in a progressive formation of human nature and an increasing development of its latent faculties, but in a transformation of the nature itself, a transfiguration of the being in its entirety, a new ascent of the species above and beyond man towards superman, leading in the end to the appearance of a divine race upon earth.

– *Bulletin*, February 1952

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